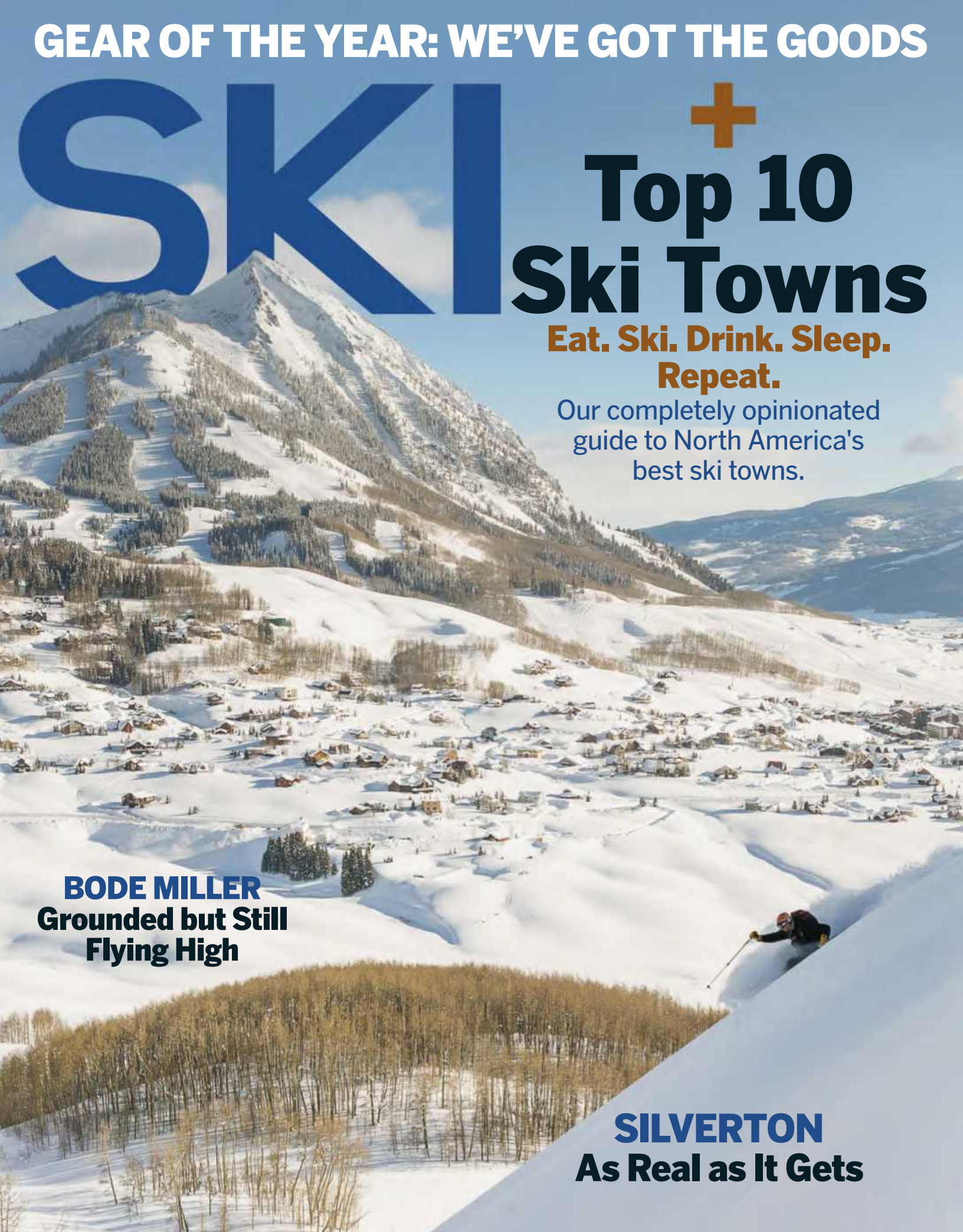
GEAR OF THE YEAR: WE'VE GOT THE GOODS

SKI +

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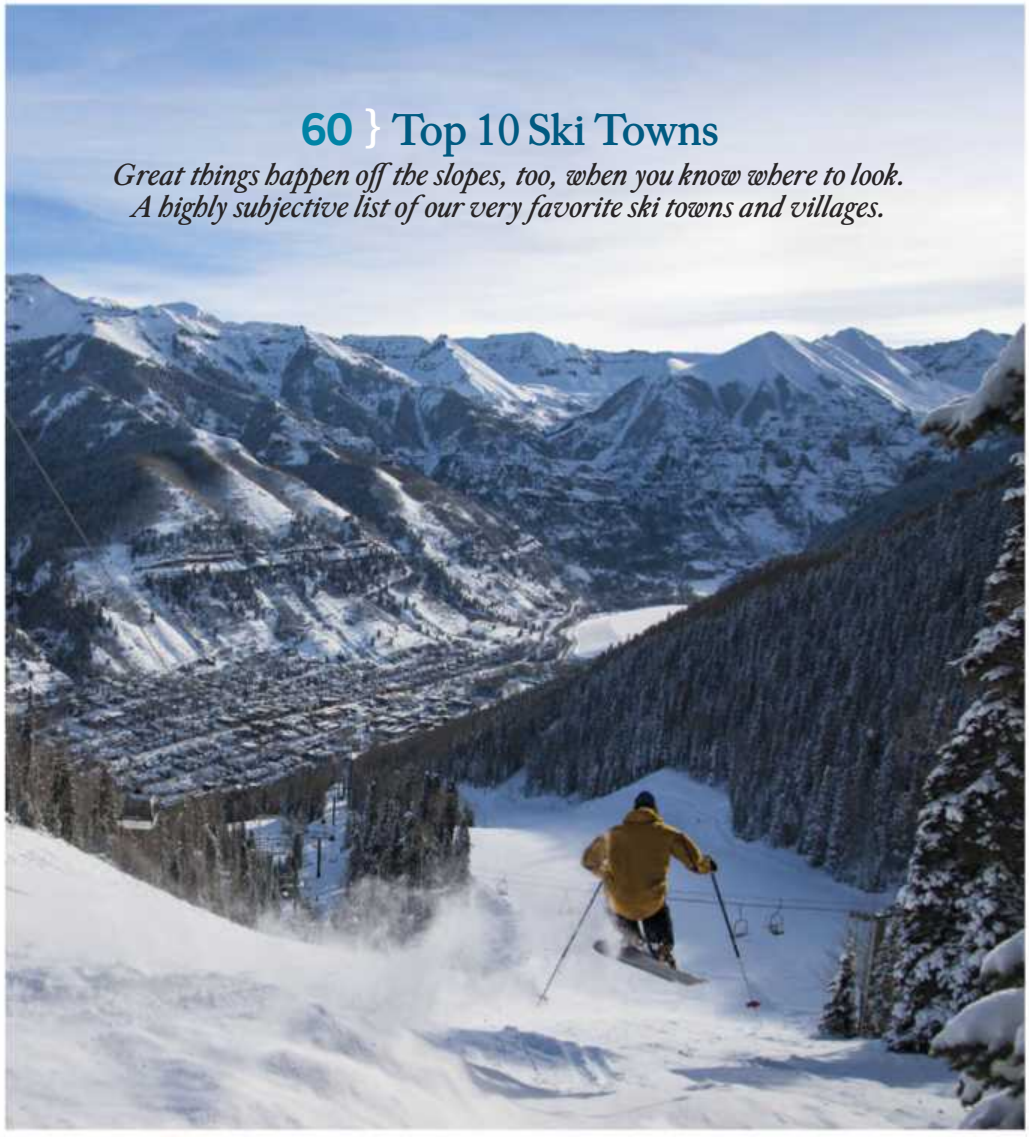
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SKI

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By Nathaniel Vinton



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By Joe Cutts, Greg Ditrinco, and Samantha Berman

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Gear Reviews » We put products through the ringer so you know what's worth buying. Our honest feedback: **Skimag.com/abused**

Video » Where funny and informative collide every other week, all season long. **Skimag.com/thesnowreport**

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Jayson Simon Jones in the Crested Butte backcountry.
PHOTOGRAPH BY **JEFF CRICCO**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: BRETT SCHRECKENGOST; KERI BASCETTA; JONATHAN SELKOWITZ

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There's something special about ski towns that keeps skiers coming back, such as walking with your best friend through downtown Aspen on a snowy evening.

C2 PHOTOGRAPHY

Flipping Out

IT WAS AFTER SENIOR-YEAR FINALS BUT before college graduation—that glorious time when dreams and schemes are hatched. I was sitting with my roommate at a campus cafeteria lunch table in Vermont, and we were trying to figure out what we were going to do with our lives—or at least our lives for the next three months. He grabbed a quarter out of his pocket and we made up the rules on the spot. Heads, exotic California beaches (hey, I was raised in western New York), or tails, the mountains of Sun Valley, Idaho. The quarter landed tails up; we both hit our hometowns for a month to earn some money, bought an ancient Volkswagen Squareback in Boston for what I recall was about $800, packed the rig, and drove west.

I ended up living in Sun Valley for about six years, settled in Aspen for another eight, with quick stops in Keystone and Breckenridge along the way. There wasn't any strategy in these wanderings (to the great consternation of my parents). Ski-town life just seemed to fit.

That emotional connection that skiers have to their favorite towns is part of the inspiration for our Top 10 Ski Towns package this month (page 60). We did look to readers for some guidance, but this is our fully biased, completely opinionated, totally partisan, but absolutely not arbitrary guide to North America's finest ski towns. And we're primed to do more research this winter, as we hope you are, too.

Elsewhere in the issue, Nathaniel Vinton, author of the recently published book *The Fall Line: How American Ski Racers Conquered a Sport on the Edge*, covered Bode Miller as he traveled around the globe throughout a bunch of World Cup seasons. He caught up with the racer in Colorado last season at Birds of Prey and again when Miller announced his non-retirement in the fall, saying he was not going to compete *this* winter. Vinton gives us a look at what keeps Miller on course in "Twilight of an American Gladiator" (page 90).

Looking back, it's funny how stuff works out. To this day, I've never been much of a beach guy. And I still call tails every chance I get. Enjoy the issue. ●

Greg Ditrinco, Editor
gditrinco@skimag.com

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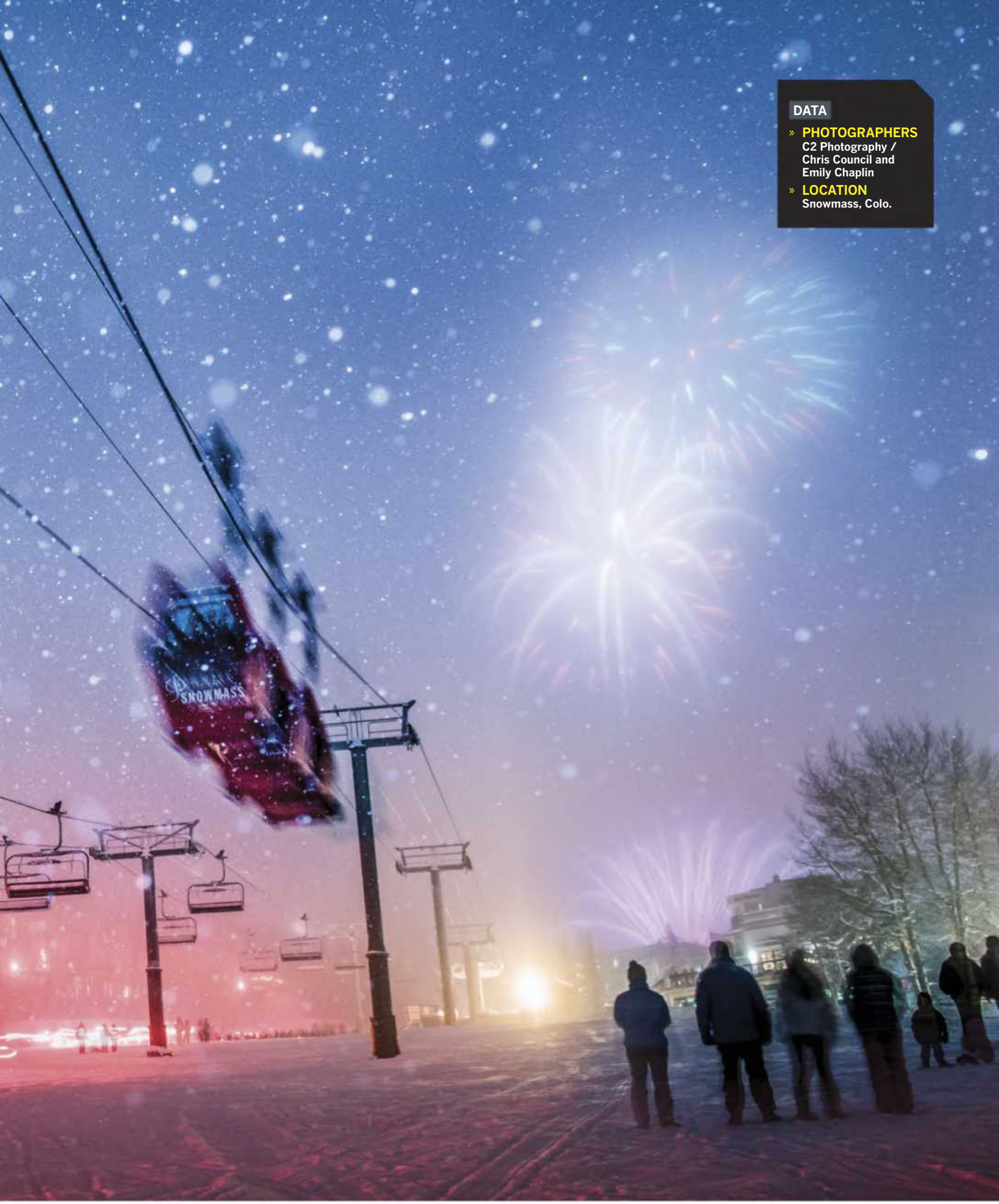
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HEAD INTO THE LIGHT » "We've photographed this event before, so it's always a challenge to find a new and different perspective," says photographer Chris Council, who was working with colleague Emily Chaplin to capture the annual Snowmass holiday fireworks show. The plan of attack was to get the perspective from high on the hill, but a heavy snowstorm forced a retreat. Instead, they ended up close to the action, and they came away with this looker—a composite of several frames shot throughout the evening.



DATA

» **PHOTOGRAPHERS**
C2 Photography / Chris Council and Emily Chaplin

» **LOCATION**
Snowmass, Colo.

Fresh



focus

REGIFTED »
We're so primed for the holidays and the gift of a bottomless day that we see Sven Brunso doing a Santa impression, snowy beard and all, deep in the San Juans of Colorado. Photographer Liam Doran sums up his experience in the region: "When the snow is on, it's really on, and when it's not—well, it's still pretty dang good!" Here, Brunso barrels into untracked goodness as the sun rises on Coal Bank Pass, outside of Silverton, making visions of powder days dance in our heads.

DATA

» **PHOTOGRAPHER**
Liam Doran

» **LOCATION**
Coal Bank Pass, Silverton, Colo.

» **SKIER**
Sven Brunso


It's time.
MONTANA
Skiing at Whitefish Mountain Resort
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You've waited long enough.

Ski season is calling your name. You've been so patient–enduring long months of warm weather, dreaming of your first cup of hot cocoa and longing for the lonely skis hiding in your basement.



Downtown Whitefish, MT

It's time—to trade your morning meetings for first chair and untracked lines. To forget every deadline hanging over your head, and focus your entire body and soul on just one thing: making that next turn the smoothest one yet.

This season, you deserve to find a place that's a little different—where skiing is still the pure, magical experience it's supposed to be.

It's time for Montana.





Ice skating on Upper Whitefish Lake, Whitefish, MT



Fly fishing the Middle Fork of the Flathead River



Mountain goat in Glacier National Park

And where better to treat yourself to a ski trip than a small town that is unexpected in the best ways—charming, inviting and friendly, nestled right in between Glacier National Park and one of the top 10 ski resorts in the country.

It's called Whitefish, and its airport (only 15 minutes from town and 30 minutes from the Base Lodge at Whitefish Mountain Resort) has direct flights from Chicago, Denver, Seattle, Minneapolis and several other cities. Here, you'll find exceptional dining and nightlife where ski pants are just as welcome as a pair of slacks. And you won't spend much time waiting in lift lines on your way to views of Glacier National Park and skiing in any direction from the summit.

Perhaps you'll fall in love with the quiet power of remote alpine vistas under a blanket of snow. Maybe you'll go ice skating, cross-country skiing or shopping along the covered sidewalks of Central Avenue. One thing's for sure: No one who's ever spent a week in Whitefish has gone on to find a better place to step out of their everyday routine, into a pair of skis, and remind themselves why winter is the best of all the seasons.

For more information on winter in Whitefish, Montana, visit **ExploreWhitefish.com**

Snap Judgment

WITH US



God Bless
A 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals panel has ruled that a 12-foot statue of Jesus that's been on the slopes of Whitefish Mountain Resort, Mont., for more than 60 years can remain there praying for powder.

Getting Schooled
As part of Learn to Ski and Snowboard month, ski-industry groups are looking to get into *The Guinness Book of World Records* on Jan. 8 by holding the largest multi-venue ski lesson ever.



That's Rich
Be happy if you ski-bummed back in the day. Seven of the richest 10 towns in Bloomberg's Index of Small Town Wealth are in ski country, including Summit Park, Utah; Jackson, and Edwards, Breck, Glenwood and Steamboat Springs. Colo.

AGAINST US



Not your typical resort-employee lineup. The cast of *Après Ski*, from left: Tamara Moore, Kendra Larkin, Jim Sced, Lynsey Dyer, Joey Gibbons, Charlotte Fenton, Bobby Crowder, Elise Wims.

face shot

Whistler meets the Kardashians

Butler butts and hot-tub boobs, with a little skiing and *lots* of attitude thrown in? Bravo takes reality TV to the slopes.

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE ABOUT WHISTLER? RIDICULOUS vert, massive high-alpine bowls, sustained GS-ready steeps, and even two mountains for the price of one. And at day's end, you click out of your boards in arguably the buzziest base village this side of the Atlantic.

But a new reality show based at the resort offers a different Whistler: seminude butlers, glacier-ice cocktails, pet-hamster massages, vertigo-suffering vegans, big boobs in heli-accessed hot springs, and once in a while a few sweet turns down a mountainside.

Promising that "luxury hits its peak," Bravo has launched the show *Après Ski* this season, touting it as a "luxury and travel docu-series." Judging by advance publicity, *Après* features Whistler as a main character, along with a supporting cast following reality TV rules: bitchy female manager, athletic babe and hunky jock, saucy assistant, funny gay dude, urban I-don't-belong-here smarty-pants, and patient second-in-command, all overseen by a chill business owner. (For a who's-who of the cast, see our reality-show stereotypes on page 22.)

It's all in good, naughty fun. Think Kardashians head to the hills. The show premiered in November and is broadcast on Mondays, 10 EST, for eight episodes.

Part of the reality of the show is Joey Gibbons, a longtime Whistler resident, local impresario (of the

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Longhorn and Garfinkel's, for a start), and CEO of Gibbons Whistler, for the family ventures. The latest is Gibbons Life, a high-end hospitality business that pampers wealthy visitors. The show's conceit is that Gibbons's startup has this season to make it or fold.

The dominant personality looks to be Elise Wims, the "operations manager" or unofficially designated hardass. The tone is set at the start, as she's introduced in a little black dress and stiletto heels. She spends much of her time berating her staff for wearing "unprofessional outfits" of mountain apparel rather than, say, "prom dresses," in the words of pro athlete Lynsey Dyer, a hired "concierge" who seems to understand the silliness and gamely plays along. The same goes for concierge Jim Sced, a Whistler local and legit adventurer. He's the romantic foil for every female on screen.

Except for a female client who finds herself on the Peak 2 Peak gondola with her fiancé, halfway along the world's longest unsupported lift span. The staff has arranged for a gourmet dinner to be served in the gondola (neat idea, actually). That's when her vertigo kicks in.

"I [bleeping] hate this," she says from the cabin. "I want off this thing right now." That's kind of how we feel about the show.

Then again, in the pilot, Sced is shown riding first chair. "Getting out and having a couple of turns in the morning is like the best cup of coffee you ever could have," he says.

Now *that's* reality. ●

Type casting answers (from left, photo on page 20): Second-in-command, smarty-pants, bunk, beholesome babe, understanding boss, saucy assistant, funny guy dude, bitch queen.



The drone technology exists to capture gorgeous images of a skier ripping through the Uinta range, east of Salt Lake City. Whether you can be that skier is another question.

trends

Game of Drones

Drones are coming to resorts, which want them for everything from vanity videos to rescue efforts. But don't expect to fly your own drone on the hill soon. BY PAUL TOLME

BRUCE MCTAVISH GLIMPSED THE DAWNING of skiing's drone era last season at Canada's Big White resort. The 60-year-old Seattleite paid a new drone-video service to film himself and his fiancée skiing a run together. "It was a lot of fun," McTavish says. "I'd always wanted to see what I look like skiing from above."

Pending various government approvals, video-drone services could soon take off at resorts across North America. And the ski industry is eyeing drones for a range of uses besides making souvenir movies, including search and rescue, wildfire spotting, chairlift inspections, and even avalanche control.

"Ski areas have tremendous interest in operating drones commercially in a broad variety of commercial and safety applications," the National Ski Areas Association wrote in a letter last April to the Federal Aviation Administration, which oversees all commercial uses of drones. Drone companies must prove their "airworthiness," and any business, from a wedding photographer to a slopeside video service, that wants to operate a drone for profit must get a federal permit.

The permit is called a Section 333 Exemption, and the FAA granted a small number of them for drone use at resorts in 2015: ESPN used drones to film at the Winter X Games in Aspen last winter, and the organizers of a Spartan Run at Squaw in the fall also got permission to use the flying cams.

Don't expect to bring your own drone to the mountain this season. With a few exceptions, ski areas have instituted broad private-drone bans for customers. Safety and liability are the top concerns. An out-of-control drone (commercial drones can weigh 50 pounds) could injure or kill. All ski areas operated on U.S. Forest Service land have authority to ban drones as part of their federal operating permit. "Ski resorts are public places with lots of infrastructure and people," says Don Dressler, who oversees 26 ski resorts in the Rocky Mountain region for the U.S. Forest Service.

Canada has looser regulations, which is why Big White and Whistler were able to

FROM TOP: ROSS DOWNARD


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A large commercial drone punches in for work in the high alpine.

offer a video-drone service last winter as part of a pilot project. In the late fall of this year, the company that offered the service, a Silicon Valley startup called Cape Productions, was awaiting FAA approval of drone procedures, such as minimum distance required between the drones and the skiing public, so it can start operating at a handful of American resorts this season, including Copper and Winter Park in Colorado and Homewood in California.

Here's how it works. Customers wear a wristband that wirelessly communicates with the drone, which is restricted to a programmed flight path—or "rail"—on a designated slope thanks to a technology called "geo fencing." The resorts also rope off the slope for use only by the filming participants. As the skier descends, the drone automatically tracks the action and films the scene from approximately 30 feet overhead. Cape then edits the footage into a 90-second to two-minute video complete with music and scenic background shots for about $150. Skiers can then share the video on Facebook and other social media. (Go to cape.com to see drone videos.)

"You sign up, meet us on the mountain, and within a day or two you get a gorgeously filmed segment," says Cape Productions co-founder Jason Soll, who grew up watching Warren Miller films and wanted to give average skiers a chance to star in their own action movies.

While Soll says drones are safe, tested, and ready for the slopes, the FAA is being exceedingly cautious due to safety and security concerns. The new generation of drones are automated and require no handheld remote controls (like the one for your kid's radio-controlled truck). However, Cape will have a "pilot in command" on the ground with the ability to "take over at all times," following federal mandates, Soll says. Regulations also require that pilots fly drones only within their line of sight. (With new wireless trackers, drones can easily follow a skier up and down a mountain, the only limitations being unobstructed airspace and battery flight time.)

The DJI drones that Cape Productions uses weigh about seven pounds, cost about $3,500, and can reach 40 mph, fast enough for the U.S. Ski Team to start using them to film super-G training runs. But a seven-pound object hurtling through the sky is the definition of a missile, hence the FAA's tight control. That said, Soll anticipates the FAA will allow restricted commercial use on slopes as early as midwinter.

Ski-school videos are another logical application. Drones could likewise be used to do all sorts of visual inspections of lifts and other remote infrastructure. Outside of resort boundaries, the sky is the limit.

CMH heli skiing partnered with Cape last season to film customers around Revelstoke. But the application goes beyond entertainment. "The potential for drones in the backcountry is huge," says Joe Flannery, president of CMH and a member of Cape Productions' advisory board. For instance, drones could help find lost or downed skiers and scout dangerous snow conditions. "You could get real-time weather images of an adjacent drainage or valley," Flannery says.

Ski-movie brands, including TGR and Warren Miller, are using drones because of their low cost. "We used to hire crews to shoot with gas-powered mini helicopters carrying heavy film cameras at around $20,000 for a one- to two-day commercial shoot," says veteran Warren Miller producer Josh Haskins. "Now we fly $2,500 drones ourselves and capture images on cameras the size of smartphones."

The drones are getting lighter, better, and cheaper. A number of companies, including Lily, GoPro, and Vantage Robotics, are launching drones for skiers and other active folks. These fully automated flying cams will literally follow you anywhere. "Ski areas recognize that there is a real demand, especially among Millennials and our younger guests, who are captivated by technology and capturing their lives on video for social media," says Dave Byrd, director of regulatory affairs for NSAA. However, nobody wants the drone to become the next selfie stick. "If everybody who owns a GoPro has a drone in the future," says McTavish, the Seattle skier, "that would be a problem." ●

FROM TOP: SILVANO REBAI/ADOBE STOCK; COURTESY OF LILY CAMERA

Say Hello to Your Little Friend

Automated flying cams are here. A number of companies are launching selfie drones, including Vantage Robotics (the Snap, $1,295, boasts sonar), Lily (shown, about $800), and GoPro—which has been mum on the details of its 2016 launch. For a peek, go to lily.camera.



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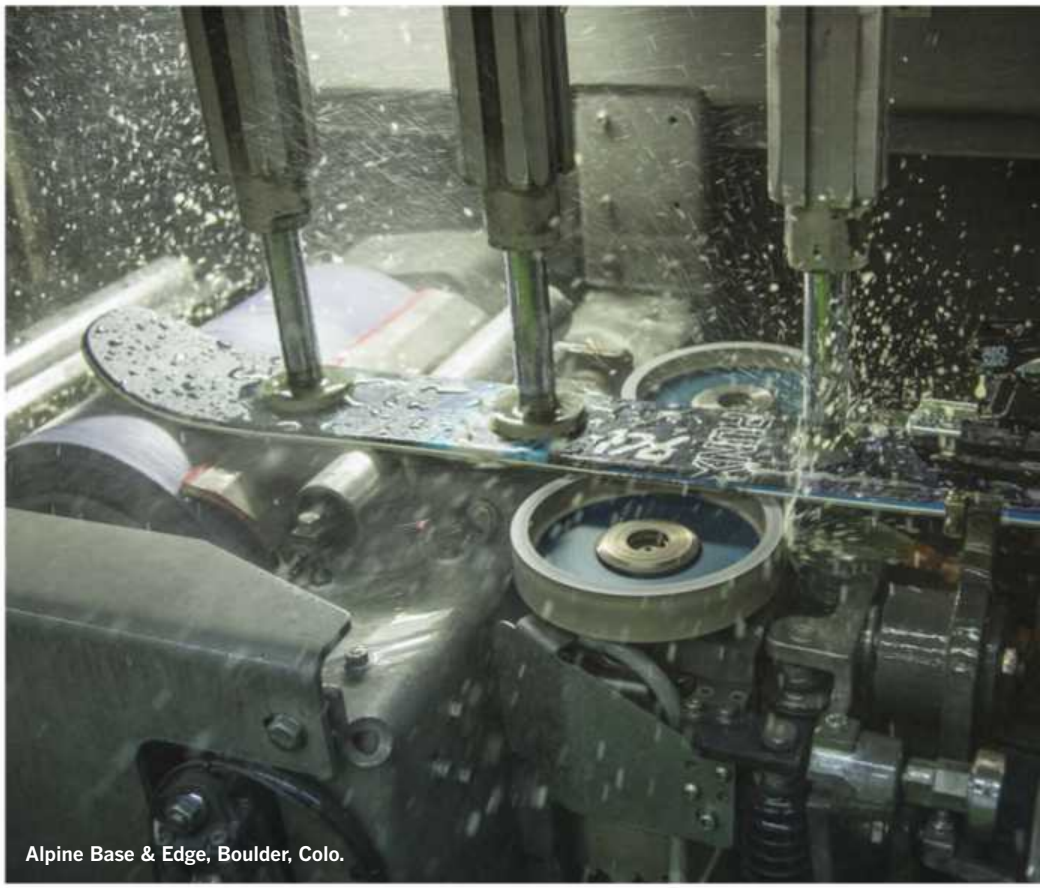
Fresh

FACTS THAT PROBABLY INTEREST ONLY US

Estimated marijuana taxes collected for the first full fiscal year (2014) after it was legalized in Colorado. Alcohol excise taxes came in at $42 million for the same period; it's the first time a state that has legalized pot (there are four: Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington) has collected more on weed than booze. Pot is taxed more steeply than alcohol, which is taxed by volume. But still...

SOURCE: *THE DENVER POST*

$70 MILLION



Alpine Base & Edge, Boulder, Colo.

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TWO-MINUTE TECH

Right in Tune » First: Tuning matters. And you don't have to be a connoisseur of gear to feel it. A fresh tune—edges sharpened, bases stone-ground and waxed—makes the old boards come alive again. Plus you get to bop into your favorite ski shop, check out the new stuff, sniff some P-tex, shoot the breeze, nurture the stoke. How often? It depends on conditions, of course, but every 10 days of normal use might be a good rule. Sooner if needed: Slide your fingers lightly along the edges; they should be clean and smooth (and, when freshly tuned, very sharp, so be careful). And inspect the base material; it should look black and glossy, never gray and fuzzy. Home tuners with tools and know-how can maintain their edges nicely—and put the wax right to her—but will still want to get the bases ground flat and true once or twice a season. Ideally it's a tight, fine-grooved grind for dry winter snow, then a coarse, open grind for wet spring snow. Many ski-town shops offer pickup and delivery. And most sell multi-tune punch cards for thrifty avid skiers.



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Fresh

drive

Pickups Square Off for Wintertime Supremacy

Brawn meets beauty in an array of family-friendly trucks designed to haul a ton of gear—and conquer cruddy roads in style. BY ANDY STONEHOUSE

FOR DECADES, LIGHT-TRUCK sales have been the engine driving the American auto industry. Trucks are still a key player, but the construction-crew pickup has evolved into a classy, well-appointed, and sophisticated machine designed for full-duty family use.

Though it's been a best seller seemingly since rubber tires were invented, the venerable Ford F-150 needed a makeover. Hence the more square-edged and aluminum-bodied new F-150, crafted to retain its iconic load-hauling strength but reduced in overall weight. Ford's added an expanded range of turbocharged engines, including a new 325-horsepower 2.7-liter EcoBoost, matching that hauling power with mileage as high as 25 mpg. With five grades available, your rig can be outfitted from basic to opulently plush.

Nissan never fully established itself in the full-size-truck arms race. The new Titan XD looks to change that. Its 310-horsepower 5.0-liter Cummins turbodiesel V-8 engine comes with 555 foot-pounds of trailer-yanking torque, and new high-power gasoline engines are on the horizon. Bigger, chrome-laden, and set on a new high-strength frame, the diesel Titan XD signals Nissan's push into the big-truck arena. There's loads of leather and wood highlights, an infotainment system, and massive seating front and back.

Competition has also heated up among midsize trucks, with the much-anticipated release of the 2016 Toyota Tacoma. The reinvented Tacoma gets an aggressively restyled face, a futuristic interior (yes, that is a GoPro camera mount by the rear-view mirror), and updated off-road technology, including multi-terrain select systems. The modernized Tacoma also receives an innovative 3.5-liter V-6 engine that uses the Atkinson cycle technology found on the Prius hybrid to boost output and improve mileage.

General Motors revitalizes two related players, the GMC Canyon and Chevrolet Colorado. Both are rugged, comfortable, but slightly downsized variations of their Sierra and Silverado brothers. They pack much of the same gear in more affordable and more efficient packages (the four-cylinder engine option will do 27 mpg or more on the highway). Each truck comes in a brawnier 4x4 variation that will have you crashing through the snow, safely. And each can be outfitted with a Duramax turbodiesel, unique to this class of pickups. ●

2016 Ford F-150
Base price » $26,315
Highway mpg » 25
Ski-trip nicety » 360-degree camera makes parking easier

2016 Nissan Titan XD
Base price » Announced early winter
Highway mpg » Announced early winter
Ski-trip nicety » Utili-track System provides bed storage options aplenty.

2016 Toyota Tacoma
Base price » $24,200
Highway mpg » 24
Ski-trip nicety » Crawl control to dig out of deep snow

2016 GMC Canyon
Base price » $20,995
Highway mpg » 27
Ski-trip nicety » Soft-touch/drop tailgate



HANDS OFF: APPLE AND ANDROID (FINALLY) TAKE CONTROL

» With smartphone technology consistently outpacing what auto manufacturers are able to provide in their navigation and entertainment systems, many carmakers have now opted to team up with the big players in mobile technology. Enter Apple's CarPlay system and Android Auto, each developed to provide simpler and safer ways to utilize your smartphone's functions while on the road. Big, easy-to-use, and instantly recognizable versions of iPhone apps appear on your car's full-size navigation screen, syncing with your smartphone to pull up music, maps, or your favorite podcast, and Siri voice control also means no more fiddling while you navigate the icy roads. Android's system effortlessly accesses Google Maps and can provide traffic updates, allow you to dictate text messages, or handle your calls. Both have received the green light on brands from Audi to Volvo.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF FORD MOTOR COMPANY; COURTESY OF VOLVO CAR GROUP

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Doug Evans, skiing off of Silverton's sole lift, shows us how it's done.

travel

Silverton Mountain, Colo.

This San Juan hot spot serves up the sickest terrain in the state—with a side of wings.

BY CRYSTAL SAGAN

STANDING AT THE WESTERN END OF THE four blocks that make up downtown—if you can even call it that—you'd think Silverton is at the center of a time warp. Buildings much older than Silverton Mountain's founders line the street, a Wild-West-meets-tourist-trap agglomeration of brightly colored facades vying for attention. There isn't a condo complex or five-star restaurant in sight, and it's charming in its own right. It's safe to say we're not in Aspen anymore, Toto.

400
ANNUAL SNOWFALL (INCHES)

8
MAX NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN A GUIDED GROUP

100
PERCENTAGE EXPERT TERRAIN

PHOTOGRAPH BY **CASEY DAY**

The former mining town—which ceased mining operations only in the early 1990s—today has roughly 650 winter residents and was at one time (pre–Silverton Mountain) the only town in Colorado with a declining population. Now Silverton Mountain is the largest private employer in town, and its visitors—and staff—bring a liveliness that spreads an electric energy at the sight of the first snowfall.

I've been told Silverton Mountain is a true skier's resort, a real backcountry experience with some serious adventure-focused terrain, minus most of the grunt work usually associated with backcountry skiing—thanks to a helicopter. Terrain varies from "mellow" 35-degree pitches and huge, wide-open bowls to lines above my pay grade—like the tight, point-it-and-go Porn Star Couloir.

Months after the jolt of the first snowfall made its way through town, I make my way to Silverton Mountain. The base area isn't what I expected. Sure, I've been to plenty of mom-and-pop resorts where the lodge was built 40 years ago and the ambience is from another decade. They're funky but appealing, and diehard locals will swear their mountain is better than any other out there. But Silverton's resort-meets-backcountry-skiing experience is taking it to a whole new level.

Terrain varies from mellow 35-degree pitches and huge, wide-open bowls to lines above my pay grade—like the tight, point-it-and-go Porn Star Couloir.

The parking lot is flanked on one end by a Nixon-era two-person chairlift and on the other by two porta-potties. Silverton's "lodge" is, in fact, not a lodge at all but a tent set on a hillside next to a stream. Inside, reggae tunes are bumping and vintage velour armchairs circle a potbellied stove.

I have yet to see anything reminiscent of the state-of-the-art midmountain lodges I grew accustomed to in the first half of my season traveling from one fancy resort to the next. But the contagious energy of people who are as excited to ski as I am is starting to make me think maybe I won't miss those white linens as much as I thought. After all, up to this point in my season I've been more impressed by all the bells and whistles of resort skiing, really, than the actual terrain that fuels the life of a skier.

With nothing to distract my group at the base, before I know it we're unloading from the resort's lone chair. Five skiers with skis on their shoulders are hiking in a line up a short pitch to our left, where at the top another group of skiers is getting into a helicopter. We follow in the tracks of the heli crowd. Score: Silverton 2, White Linens 0.

Heli drops are definitely the way to go here. Individual rides start at $179, you can buy a full day's worth up front, or, for a bit of a higher price tag, your whole group can reserve a private helicopter and bogart the bird all day. Your thirst for the heli not satiated yet? Stay in Aspen or Telluride and arrange for a helicopter to pick you up for the seven-minute







You can just ski off the lift, but heli is the way to really ski Silverton. Afterward, hit Greene Street, the main drag, for pizza and a beer.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF SILVERTON; KERI BASCETTA; COURTESY OF SILVERTON

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flight to Silverton Mountain, where you can then shred all day. That means bells and whistles *and* Silverton's sick terrain.

We purchase a handful of single drops, and Silverton's black and yellow A-Star drops us across the valley at the top of the Grande. The 2,000-foot-long couloir is a sort of rite of passage at Silverton, being the most prominent line you can see from the top of the lift across the valley. Its wide berth begs for the big turns and high speeds I've been dreaming of all season.

I'm jittery from the excitement of standing at the top of the Grande—and slightly worried that the corduroy groomers and three-course lunches I've been enjoying this season might not have prepared me for the challenge ahead. I try to calm my nerves, which doesn't really work, so I just drop in.

Three turns down, I couldn't care less about the midmountain five-star restaurant that doesn't exist here. This is the real deal—I'm surrounded on both sides by gargantuan rock faces, skiing a line that opens into a bowl filled with untouched powder (which I will definitely write home about). Forget world-class resort experiences; this is the world-class *skiing* I've been looking for.

The heli is waiting for us on the valley floor to take us back up to what I'm sure will be another line of a lifetime. I've just experienced inbounds terrain I never imagined existed in Colorado—or anywhere in the Lower 48. No amuse-bouche during après this evening? Hell, no après at all this evening? I don't care. Crack me a PBR chilled in the snow. I want untouched powder and face shots. After all, I am a skier. There's no going back now. ●

1,819
SKIABLE ACRES VIA LIFT

13,487
HIKE-TO ELEVATION (FEET)

22,000
SKIABLE ACRES VIA HELI



Downtown's Rum Bar—formerly Montanya Distillers—creates killer rum cocktails. Happy skiers ride the party, er, shuttle bus to the base.

STAY

The Benson
Silverton isn't new—most buildings are over 100 years old—so these designer suites stand out from the crowd. The modern-meets-mountain decor is cozy, and rooms are limited, so book early.

EAT

Avalanche Brewing Company
Its from-scratch pizzas are just what the doctor ordered after a long day of making turns. Try the Thai Pie with a Treasure Mountain pale ale.

APRÈS

The Rum Bar
Don't leave town without sipping a Claw Dog. The cucumber-infused Colorado rum, fresh ginger, and lime will leave you singing Silverton's praises.



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE RUM BAR; CRYSTAL SAGAN



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tip sheet

Sun Down Bowl, Vail. Colo.

Take a few spins in one of Vail's most intimidating Back Bowls.

BY JACKIE MCCAFFREY BRADLEY



DATA

- **LOCATION** Vail, Colo.
- **GETTING THERE** From the Vail Village base, take Gondola One to Mid-Vail. From there, hop on Wildwood Express.
- **VERTICAL FEET** 1,857
- **ACRES** 540
- **SCARE FACTOR** This bowl packs a vertical punch. Thanks to a 43.5-degree pitch on O.S. (which is short for Oh Shit, by the way), your thighs will be on fire well before you reach the bottom.

TERRAIN » Don't expect any groomed terrain; Sun Down Bowl is an advanced skier's stomping ground. While most of the bowl is wide open, the west side serves up fun trees and cliff drops. There are also some gullies separating trails. Warning: They look far shallower than they actually are, so be careful trying to cross them. You might end up bib-deep in powder.

HOW TO SKI IT » From the top of the Wildwood lift, skate across to the gate in front of Game Creek Express. Stay high on the traverse and drop in skier's left to Ricky's Ridge. If you have enough speed (and want to do some tree skiing), continue on the traverse around the ridge to O.S. Once you've done one lap, take the High Noon Express and either ski back down to Wildwood Express via Ramshorn on the front side to do another loop, or drop in right under High Noon Express and continue skier's right to Wow.

APRÈS » Located in the heart of Vail Village, the Red Lion is one of the resort's most iconic bars. The draft beers are huge (20 ounces) and there's almost always live music in the afternoon. You'll be in good company too; most people are sporting ski boots and fresh goggle tans. If you're looking for something a little quieter, try Tavern on the Gore, with a great beer selection and the most amazing edamame you'll ever have (for real).

BETA » High Noon Express tends to get super crowded midday. Hit it in the morning or the early afternoon. If it hasn't snowed in a while, avoid the east-facing slopes, which are most likely sunbaked, windblown, and crusty.

MAP: COURTESY OF VAIL RESORTS. THUMBNAILS, FROM LEFT: JACK AFFLECK; COURTESY OF THE RED LION; COURTESY OF VAIL RESORTS/DAN DAVIS.

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scene

eat

Ramen Revival

The once humble—and budget-minded—noodle might be the perfect ski-day picker-upper.

BY RADHA MARCUM

RAMEN, A SALTY, BELLY-WARMING NOODLE soup with humble, working-class origins, may be the perfect mountain food—so say chefs from Hokkaido to British Columbia. Inspired by Japanese ski areas and trend-setting restaurants like Momofuku Noodle Bar in New York City and Toronto, resort chefs embrace ramen as a fresh alternative to the typical heavy, soporific mountain fare based on bread and meat.

Celebrated in Japan as *kokumin shoku* (the "national meal"), ramen is traditionally prepared with thin, mineral-infused wheat noodles in a meat or miso broth. To this, chefs add regional proteins such as pork or tofu, seasonal vegetables, seaweed, pickles, and scallions. Ramen recipes are as various as the chefs who specialize in them.

"In Japan, everyone has their own idea of what makes an outstanding ramen bowl," says Hiromi Sagara, who runs Niseko Ramen Kazahana, in Hokkaido, with her husband, chef Kazuhiro. "Every region has their own special ramen flavor and ingredients, which are tied to their history and climate. Ramen is so many things in one bowl." The Hokkaido region boasts exceptional miso and potato ramen, for example.

That flexibility lends itself well to the resort kitchens of North America, such as Rendezvous Lodge at Whistler Blackcomb, with its newly added ramen station. "We're sourcing ingredients locally as much as possible," says Wolfgang Sterr, executive chef. He buys high-quality noodles in Vancouver, and the pork comes from a farm in the nearby Fraser Valley.

"Ramen has become so much more than the instant noodles we ate in college," says Vermont-based chef Thad Buck. "Ramen shops are popping up all over the U.S." Buck developed the pork ramen recipe for the

COURTESY OF WHISTLER BLACKCOMB/MATT WALKER



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF NISEKO; COURTESY OF HUBERT SCHRIEBL; COURTESY OF MATTHEW VEGA; COURTESY OF OKEMO

new ramen room at Mulligan's at Stratton. "It's a very versatile dish that any chef can put their spin on," he says.

The Japanese enjoy ramen anytime, anywhere, says Sagara, but particularly after drinks, such as sake. "This is called *shime*, which means a closure of the drinking session," she explains. "It makes you warm, fully fed, and relaxes your mind and muscles." Ready to dip in? You'll find these noodle bars on and off the mountains, serving made-to-order bowls for an outstanding midday fuel-up or conclusion to après-ski.

RENDEZVOUS LODGE
Whistler Blackcomb, B.C.

For a lunch that won't hold you back during afternoon runs, Rendezvous's classic take on ramen comes with a clear meat broth and noodles brought in specially from a maker in Vancouver. Enjoy a variety of add-ins such as pork belly, scallions, seaweed, bamboo shoots, bean sprouts, and corn. *whistlerblackcomb.com*



NISEKO RAMEN KAZAHANA
Niseko, Hokkaido, Japan

Before chef and owner Kazuhiro Sagara opened Niseko Ramen Kazahana, he spent six months developing his unique ramen recipes, combining the Hokkaido region's two specialties, miso ramen and potato ramen. The result? An unparalleled bowl of earthy miso topped with fluffy cream-laced potato. Try a bowl of the spicy habañero-miso ramen too.



MULLIGAN'S
Stratton, Vt.

Mulligan's new ramen room features a rich, homemade pork broth with authentic Sun Noodle ramen. Choose shredded roasted pork or tofu with your veggies; top with kimchi, the Korean spicy fermented cabbage, if you wish. *stratton.com*



NUDORU RAMEN BAR
Vail, Colo.

Ramen broths vary from clear and light to creamy and rich. Tonkotsu ramen has the latter, created by slow-cooking pork and chicken bones. Nudoru offers steaming-hot bowls of luscious house-made tonkotsu with pork belly, or veggie or chicken bowls in miso or sesame broth. Pair one with yakitori skewers or sticky wings to replenish after a day on the slopes. *nudoruvail.com*



EPIC AT SOLITUDE
Okemo, Vt.

Epic's new Japanese Noodle Hot Pot—spicy broth, rice noodles, and fresh, crunchy vegetables—is served in a bowl made by a local artisan. For a boost of protein, add seared tuna, scallops, or beef. *okemo.com*

après

High Spirited

Craft distilleries continue their ascent across the mountain West.

BY SAMANTHA BERMAN





Jackson Hole Still Works, Jackson, Wyo. » This new operation produces just one product—Highwater Vodka, made with 100 percent Wyoming-grown corn and oats. Even the bottle is local, adorned with a reproduction of a painting created by local artist Katy Anne Fox just for the distillery. Visit the tasting room for free samples, and check back for news on production of future spirits, including gin and bourbon. *jhstillworks.com*

BackDrop Distilling, Bend, Ore. » Bend's newest distillery is inside the GoodLife Brewery and bottles the smooth, wheat-based BackDrop Vodka with plans to make rum, bourbon, and whiskey. Sharing space with a brewery is a boon: BackDrop has designs to add beer cocktails to the menu and to assist the brewery in making barrel-aged beers. *backdropdistilling.com*

Marble Distilling Company, Carbondale, Colo. » A distillery that's also an inn? Makes sense if you think about it. Marble opened in June with a tasting room, a small-plates restaurant, and five king rooms with fireplaces and samples of Marble's spirits. Pretty much everything you need right there. The flagship product, Crystal River Vodka 80, is made with local wheat and barley and distilled five times in a copper pot. Also look for the Gingercello, Marble's take on the classic limoncello liqueur. *marbledistilling.com*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF JACKSON HOLE STILL WORKS/G-FRA; COURTESY OF MARBLE DISTILLING/G. DIDIER; COURTESY OF Q BURKE HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER

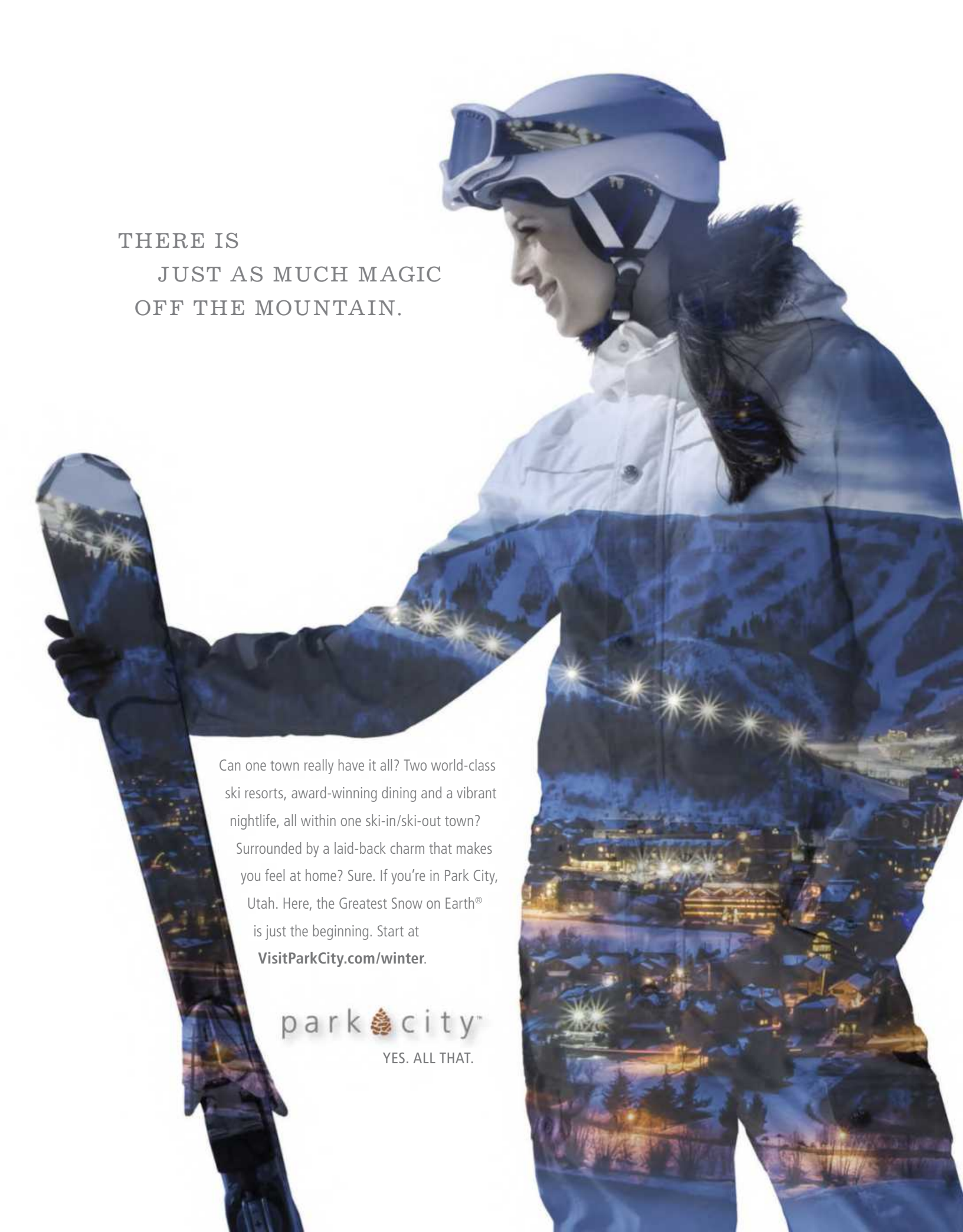


sleep

Q Burke Mountain Resort Hotel and Conference Center

Move over, Jay Peak. Q Burke is looking to steal your spotlight. The Quiros family—which also owns Jay—purchased what's now called Q Burke in 2012 and has since funneled more than $100 million into this remote Northeast Kingdom resort. (And put the quizzical "Q" in its moniker.) The plan is to reimagine Q Burke much as it did Jay Peak, which has seen skier visits grow from 150,000 a year to over 400,000 over the past several seasons.

The centerpiece of the project, the Q Burke Mountain Resort Hotel and Conference Center, opens this month. The behemoth 180,000-square-foot property features 116 studio to three-bedroom suites, many with kitchens, fireplaces, and balconies. Other amenities include restaurants and bars, a ski shop, an arcade, a fitness center, and an outdoor pool and hot tubs. The slopeside property is expected to do for Burke what the Tram Haus did for Jay. We're no psychics, but might there be a water park in Q Burke's future? Stay tuned. *qburke.com*


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family

The Parent Whisperer

So you want to turn your ski racer into the next Mikaela Shiffrin? Stop trying.

BY EDITH THYS MORGAN

AS AN OLYMPIC SKIER WHO NOW OCCUPIES THE SIDELINES watching my own kids compete in the sport, I'm often assumed to have special insights about at least two things:

1. Who will be "the next Mikaela Shiffrin," and
2. How, as a parent, to create "the next Mikaela Shiffrin."

I hate to disappoint, but I can't help much with either. On the first point, I could never predict any youngster's superstardom, especially not in skiing, where an unfathomable combination of circumstances and lucky breaks must come together before anyone has a shot at the sport's highest levels. In addition to talent and opportunity, kids need physical and emotional maturity to progress through the increasing stresses of competition and training, access to optimal training venues and coaches, competitive peers, the right equipment (and lots of it), luck in avoiding injury, and, perhaps most important, relentless and single-minded motivation.

That last factor leads to my deliberate abstention from point No. 2, the making of a phenom. You can't force a kid into being the next great thing, but you can do a lot of damage trying. Many a young skier has blazed through the junior ranks only to stall at a critical juncture and then disappear in frustration. And many others quit the sport long before reaching their potential because too much pressure too soon sucked all the joy out of skiing.

This is not uncommon in youth sports, where parents with the best intentions tend to ramp up expectations at the first sign of "talent," aspire to elite teams at ever earlier ages, get nutty on the sidelines, and proudly post podium shots for all to see "the reward." The pressure created by this behavior contributes to the oft-cited stat that 70 percent of kids quit sports by the age of 13. What a shame.

So most of my advice to parents is not to push harder but to back off, to focus on the enduring and hard-earned benefits of the process rather than the fleeting high of each positive outcome. Every March, just as championship season froths up, I give parents my "Long Road" speech, which advocates a broader perspective on sports development and extols the long-term value of failure.

> You can't force a kid into being the next great thing, but you can do a lot of damage trying.

Ski parents may have bigger sidelines on which to hide, but we also have incentives to keep our behavior in check. Most of us actually participate in the sport. If our kids suddenly decide to quit, say, baseball, it may not affect us much, if at all. If they sour on skiing, that's goodbye to ski vacations, to having something fun to do when it's below freezing, and to potential ski days with grandchildren. That vision makes my ski-parenting role crystal clear. My main job, like that of an entertainer, is to keep 'em coming back for more.

Depending on how you define it, "success" in a sport can take a long time to play out. I have the privilege of interviewing some of the most successful ski racers of all time, and I've noticed a pattern. Those with notoriously pushy parents, once they became parents themselves, choose not to get their own kids involved in racing. Success can be the sum of moments on a podium, but it can also be pushing your kids down the driveway for the first time, chasing after them on the bunny hill, and, when the time comes, freezing your butt off on the side of a hill as the show goes on. ●

Edith Thys Morgan skied on the World Cup circuit for six years and competed in the 1988 and 1992 Winter Games. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband and two teenage sons.

JULIE SHIPMAN

WHO WE ARE IS WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND.

It's been said our lives, our legacies, are simply the sum total of all the choices we make. Theodore Roosevelt certainly understood this when, in 1906, he fought the conventional wisdom of his time and set aside millions of acres of land to be preserved for future generations. And it's something Subaru understood when, over a decade ago, we became the first U.S. auto manufacturer to achieve zero landfill, with all waste recycled or turned into electricity. It wasn't easy. Doing the right thing rarely is. But like President Roosevelt, we made a commitment to something we believe in: the future. It's this promise that now leads us to share our expertise with the National Park Service as we work together toward the goal of making our irreplaceable national treasures zero landfill as well. Because loving the earth means understanding you can't throw anything away, because there simply is no "away."



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Gear

toolbox

Sidekicks

Here are convenience-minded gadgets that you could certainly live without. But why would you?

BY LILY KRASS



ENERPLEX
Jumpr Slate 5K

We can live with our legs losing power by 4 p.m. on a pow day, but our phones? Absolutely not. With cold temperatures and lousy cell reception quickly draining batteries, portable chargers are a hot product category for skiers and winter travelers. We like the Jumpr because it's super low-profile, featherlight at seven ounces, and reasonably priced—and it still charges your phone three or four times on the move.

$60; goenerplex.com

CYNTUR
JumperPack Mini

The resort was empty, no one to snake your line. But guess what? There's also no one to jump your car. The JumperPack Mini is your friend on a powder day and is just slightly bigger than your new smartphone. Bonus points for an LED torch, emergency strobe, and USB port for charging your phone and other necessities.



$99; cyntur.com

STANLEY
Adventure Happy Hour 2x System

Toast a great day on the slopes without leaving the slopes. This stainless bar-on-the-go makes a post-run martini possible so you can celebrate...well, being post-run. The goods include a 20-ounce shaker, two rocks glasses, a citrus reamer, and a jigger. The pieces nest into the shaker so you can stash it in your backpack for those celebratory mountain moments.



$35; stanley-pmi.com

DAKINE
Quick Tune 16w

Judge a man by the condition of his skis? You could do worse. This pocket-size tuning kit has everything you need to keep your (ski) life in order on the fly: a torque driver with five bits and a wrench, an edge-tuning tool, a triangle scraper, all-temperature wax, and a scuff pad.



$50; dakine.com

SKULLCANDY
Grind Headphones

We don't typically advocate hiding from the world, but on a crowded flight or a long shuttle ride from airport to slopes, well, you gotta do what you gotta do. The new Grind is a comfy, lightweight on-ear headphone that sounds way bigger than its price, with metal construction to handle the pace.



$60; skullcandy.com

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **CHARLIE HUMPAL**

style

Shiny Things

Metallics are hot, so go ahead and shimmer this holiday season—on and off the slopes.

BY SAMANTHA BERMAN



1. **CANADA GOOSE HYBRIDGE LITE DOWN JACKET**
The Canadians know how to keep warm, and this jacket comes through. The lightweight Hybridge is 800-fill down in the body and arms with an abrasion-resistant softshell on the sides for ease of movement. And the Silverbirch color with red contrast zipper is just fab. ***$525; canada-goose.com***

2. **SHRED MEGA BRAIN BUCKET RAPTOR HELMET**
If this snazzy helmet is good enough to protect the noggin of World Cup racer Lara Gut during super-G runs, it's good enough for you. Details: It adheres to the new FIS 2013 safety standards, and it looks great doing it. ***$297; shredoptics.com***

3. **JULBO TITAN GOGGLE**
Julbo's largest goggle boasts photochromic antifog lenses with built-in ventilation. The gold lens color works great in flat light, and the large frame offers an excellent field of vision. ***$220; julbousa.com***

4. **ORAGE MEN'S REDFORD JACKET**
Designed for warmth, the stylish Redford is filled with synthetic insulation and a water-resistant outer fabric that can repel light snow. The blingy gold zippers with leather pulls complete the look. ***$300; orage.com***

5. **SPY PRESIDIO SUNGLASSES**
These sweet sunnies smack of the aviator era, updated with comfortable silicone nose pads and Spy's Happy Lenses in merlot with gold mirror. They'll brighten your day for sure. ***$140; spyoptic.com***

6. **CHAOS WOMEN'S FOIL HAT**
This fun, slouch-style knit hat sports a wrapped-in-tinfoil look, so the aliens won't be able to read your mind while you're wearing it. ***$25; chaos.com***

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ANDREW BYDLON**



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SKI STRONG. SKI SMART.

Where Good Turns Begin

The transition: that critical moment, pregnant with possibilities, between one turn and the next. Get it right, and good things happen. BY MICHAEL ROGAN

USUALLY WHEN WE SEE GREAT SKI-racing photos, the racer's right at the gate. That's where the drama is. Take a world-class athlete, give him some very hard snow, very sharp skis, and lots of speed, and the results are awesome—the working ski tipped way up on edge, the inside hip brushing the snow.

As you can see, this photo of U.S. Ski Team up-and-comer Michael Ankeny is different, taken when he's above the gate, at the moment of transition from one turn to the next. His form is perfect, and yet, to the untrained eye...it's kind of a boring picture.

Truth is, those boring transitions are what enable exciting skiing to happen. Control the transition and you control the rest of the turn. Look good during the transition—keeping it clean, precise, and disciplined—and you'll look good in the money shot.

Working with the Team, I've watched Ankeny strive to improve his transitions. The proof is in this picture. It might not look exciting—even though he's going about 35 mph on sheer ice—but there's a ton to learn from it.

Most of us aren't world-class athletes. We despise very hard snow, our skis could probably use a tune, and what we think is fast is, well, not really *that* fast. But our transitions are just as important. Here's what to learn from this photo of Ankeny:

» **Stance:** Ankeny's athletic stance here is one from which any sport can be played. Hands and arms out in front. Legs flexed and ready to spring. Head up and vision forward.

» **Outside (right) leg:** It's long and strong at the end of the old turn, aligned to resist forces so that Ankeny doesn't get squashed into the back seat.

» **Inside (left) leg:** His left ankle is flexed; his left foot is in under his center of mass. This allows Ankeny to transfer his weight to his new outside ski, engaging its edge to start carving early in the turn—a key to finding speed.

» **Zipper and head:** Ankeny's head and zipper line up over the space between his knees and are more vertically aligned than his legs. This means there is no chance he will lean inside and lose balance against his outside (right) ski.

» **Upper body:** The lines of his shoulders and waist are parallel. This means his entire upper body is well positioned to stay balanced during this transition so that he can get his new outside (left) ski to carve ASAP.

» **Inside (left) shoulder, arm, and hand:** They are leading the way into the next turn, staying out ahead of the opposite side. This ensures that Ankeny doesn't rotate his upper body uphill and thus lose the edge grip of his outside ski. It also provides the prefect direction to move everything into the fall line. Notice that his shoulders are facing slightly downhill of his ski tips.



SKI's director of instruction, Michael Rogan, is a PSIA Alpine Team captain, USSA Team Academy coach, and Heavenly, Calif., instructor. He spends his summers enjoying more winter at Portillo, Chile, where he's resident manager.

The U.S. Ski Team's Michael Ankeny is yet another product of the amazing Buck Hill, Minn., race club (like Kristina Koznick and Lindsey Vonn). He attends Dartmouth College as his racing career allows.



READY TO SPRING
The athletic stance, common to all sports, puts you in a position to react.

LEVEL AND PLUMB
The upper body should be vertically aligned; shoulders and hips level.

INSIDE ARM LEADS
The inside hand, arm, and shoulder should lead the way into the top of the coming turn.

INSIDE ANKLE FLEXED
Flexing the inside ankle puts the new outside ski in a good place to take over.

STANDING STRONG
Finish the turn emphatically with a long and strong outside leg.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **JONATHAN SELKOWITZ/SELKOPHOTO**



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SKI TEAM STARS

NASTAR gives kids a chance to ski like the stars



2016 Team Preview
Fast Company: Lindsey, Mikaela, and Ted

Racer Diary
Catching Up With the World's Best GS Skier

Gold Standard
Get the Ultimate Season Pass

Ted Ligety and fan

If you're a ski racing fan, Thanksgiving weekend in Aspen and early December at Beaver Creek are etched in stone on your calendar. That's when the Audi FIS Ski World Cup comes to America–a showcase for the stars of the U.S. Ski Team.



Mikaela Shiffin

The Colorado races kick off the core of the World Cup season with great anticipation. Will Lindsey Vonn extend her record 67 World Cup wins? Can Mikaela Shiffrin win a fourth straight slalom globe and extend her reach into speed? Ted Ligety will be going for an unprecedented sixth straight GS win at Beaver Creek, but what will it take for him to regain the crystal globe? And, will we see Bode Miller racing again?

If you're a hardcore ski racing fan, you'll be in the stands at Aspen or Beaver Creek. If not, you'll be glued to the live stream and coverage on NBC and NBCSN. It's the start of the white circus that will criss-cross the globe to over a dozen nations and three continents before it all ends this March at St. Moritz for the World Cup Finals.

Vonn, who also won a record 19th season title last year, was hampered this summer with a small ankle fracture. But she was back running gates on Austrian glaciers in October and will be in the start at Aspen—the first time in three years. Shiffrin has looked sharp all summer, including a sojourn onto the speed course in Portillo. In between on-snow camps in Chile and New Zealand this summer, Ligety got married to longtime girlfriend Mia. He desperately wants a sixth GS globe, but continues to have his sights set on the overall. In the Audi Birds of Prey downhill, watch for last year's podium finisher Steven Nyman and World Championships silver medalist Travis Ganong to battle for the win. And Bode? Well, it's anyone's guess.



Lindsey Vonn



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Think about it. One pass, 250 resorts, all access. The U.S. Ski Team Gold Pass offers unlimited skiing and is fully transferable. Best of all, your donation goes to support the dreams of U.S. Ski Team athletes. Check it out at **ussagoldpass.org**.



Goin' Big at Fenway

Talk about going big! With a towering jump 140-feet high, the world's best freeskiers and snowboarders will soar Feb. 11-12 in Boston's iconic Fenway Park. Tickets on sale now at **redsox.com/bigair**.

COVER: U.S. SKI TEAM-SARAH BRUNSON
THIS PAGE (FROM TOP): ©SARAH BRUNSON / U.S. SKI TEAM ; GETTY IMAGES/ ALAIN GROSCLAUDE/AGENCE ZOOM





A good start can make a world of difference.

When Olympic and World Champion Ted Ligety started racing, he benefited from the support of NASTAR.

Putnam Investments is proud to stand behind Ted and NASTAR's effort to help young skiers realize their dreams.

US SKI TEAM | NATURE VALLEY NASTAR

Two-time Olympic Gold Medalist
Five-time World Champion
24 GS World Cup wins
3 GS world championship gold medals

A world of investing.®

Putnam INVESTMENTS

TED LIGETY: BECOMING A CHAMPION

Ligety started in NASTAR. Today he's a champion. Who's next?

Last season Ted Ligety won his third straight World Championship GS gold, marking his fifth consecutive win on the Beaver Creek course. But this season he has his sights set on regaining the Audi FIS Ski World Cup GS season-long title that eluded him last year.

Your career is filled with gold. How special was it to win in Beaver Creek?
That win was a little more emotional just because last year was a struggle. In 2013, I was winning everything - same with the Olympics. This one was a bigger question mark as far as how I was skiing and how I could handle it. To be able to come through and pull it off is awesome.

Ted, you grew up on the mountain in Park City but how did you get into racing?
I loved skiing from when I was four. I began to love ski racing at 11. I first got my taste of skiing gates with NASTAR. When I was finally able to beat my dad it was pretty gratifying. Being introduced to NASTAR and having that chance to test your skills in a measurable way was really cool.

How important is NASTAR in getting kids into the sport?
NASTAR is where most ski racers in America were introduced to the thrill of going fast and competing. It's always been a gateway to more competitive skiing so the partnership with U.S. Ski Team is an obvious one to help broaden the pathways to become passionate about ski racing.

What do you love about ski racing?
I love the rush of ski racing—it's so much fun trying to push my limits, trying to find the fastest line and squeeze tenths out of my run. NASTAR gives you that ability on any mountain to see how you stack up.

What does it take to make a champion ski racer?
What makes a champion in my mind is doing your best in the most crucial situation, whether it's winning or losing. It's having all those things come together at the perfect moment when you're giving your all—being able to compete under high pressure and be successful at it.

Do you remember the first time you felt you were a champion?
It was in a NASTAR course, getting a gold medal and being super psyched on that. Knowing that you're pretty good at something was a good feeling.

Any tips to leave kids?
Have fun with it. When you're having fun it's really easy to work hard. I love what I'm doing—I make the gym fun on the long days pumping weights. The sensation of racing, feeling the pressure of the situation but also the sensation of going fast, the wind in your face—taking the tightest line and trying to arc the most down the course is a ton of fun. The satisfaction of knowing that you gave it your all and were really pushing your limits - it's so cool to cross the finish line and feel like you put yourself on the line and did it well.

GETTY IMAGES/ALEXIS BOICHARD/AGENCE ZOOM



Ted Ligety flying down the Birds of Prey course.











US SKI TEAM | NATURE VALLEY NASTAR

TED LIGETY

NATIONAL PACESETTER

INTRODUCING

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MARCH 24-27, 2016

NASTAR.COM



U.S. Ski Team athletes Steven Nyman and Stacey Cook set the pace with young racers on and off the NASTAR course.

NASTAR: GATEWAY TO THE U.S. SKI TEAM

The exhilaration of speed and head-to-head racing with your friends

For skiers young and old, there's nothing like the exhilaration of going head to head with friends down a NASTAR course at ski resorts coast to coast. That's how Ted Ligety got his start, racing family and friends and ultimately winning Olympic gold.

NASTAR is the acronym for the NAtional STAndard Race, the largest public grassroots ski racing program in the world. More than 65,000 skiers every year race at over 120 participating resorts, competing within their age and gender groups to win platinum, gold, silver and bronze medals. In addition, participants are ranked in their medal group and the top ranked racers qualify to compete in the Nature Valley NASTAR National Championships at Steamboat Ski Resort March 24-27, with over 1,200 racers taking part.

NASTAR provides recreational racers with an opportunity to compare their scores to friends and family members regardless of when and where they race. The NASTAR handicap system is a standardized scoring program that provides participants with a tangible number that represents their ability. The NASTAR.com website records each participants stats and ranks each racer at the host resort, in their state of residence and nationally.

"I first got my taste of skiing gates with NASTAR," said Olympic champion Ted Ligety. "When I was finally able to beat my dad it was pretty gratifying. Being introduced to NASTAR and having that chance to test your skills in a measurable way was really cool."

It all kicks off in November when regional pacesetters go head to head with U.S. Ski Team stars, past and present, at the Putnam Investments NASTAR Pacesetting Trials at Copper Mountain. With Olympians like Ligety setting the pace, regional pacesetters carry their handicaps back to the resorts, with mathematical formulas providing NASTAR racers of all ages with the ability to compare their time to U.S. Ski Team athletes.

This year the U.S. Ski Team will take on an even more visible role with NASTAR, integrating stars into the program and looking for top young racers who can graduate into local USSA ski racing programs.

Whether you're hoping to become a ski racing star or just want to have fun, NASTAR provides an exhilarating experience for skiers of all ages.

© CAMARA PHOTOGRAPHY


US SKI TEAM
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BOY'S AMBUSH JACKET
AND PROPULSION PANT

WATCH THE WORLD'S BEST

(all times EST)

NATURE VALLEY ASPEN WINTERNATIONAL

Aspen, CO – Nov. 28-29

Sat. Nov. 28	3:30 p.m.	NBCSN	Women's GS LIVE
Sun. Nov. 29	3:00 p.m.	NBC	Women's SL LIVE

AUDI BIRDS OF PREY

Beaver Creek, CO – Dec. 4-6

Fri. Dec. 4	12:30 p.m.	NBCSN	Men's DH LIVE
Sat. Dec. 5	1:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Men's SG LIVE
Sun. Dec. 6	5:00 p.m.	NBC	Men's GS

PUTNAM INVESTMENTS LAKE PLACID FREESTYLE CUP

Lake Placid, NY – Jan. 14-16

Sat. Jan. 16	2:30 p.m.	NBC	Moguls
Sat. Jan. 16	6:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Moguls
Sun. Jan. 17	5:00 p.m.	NBC	Team aerials
Sun. Jan. 17	6:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Aerials

U.S. GRAND PRIX

Mammoth Mountain, CA – Jan. 23-24

Sun. Jan. 24	3:00 p.m.	NBC	Halfpipe Skiing
Sun. Jan. 24	2:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Slopestyle SB
Tue. Jan. 26	10:30 p.m.	NBCSN	Slopestyle Skiing
Sat. Jan. 30	3:00 p.m.	NBC	Halfpipe SB



Grab the U.S. Ski Team with one hand



Now you can follow Ted, Lindsey, Mikaela and more in the palm of your hand with the new iOS mobile app from the U.S. Ski Team and SkiRacing.com. It features a wide array of content from athlete profiles to action video and live timing. **Download it in the app store today.**

VISA FREESTYLE INTERNATIONAL

Deer Valley Resort, UT – Feb. 4-6

Sat. Feb. 6	7:30 p.m.	NBCSN	Moguls
Sun. Feb. 7	4:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Aerials
Sun. Feb. 14	2:30 p.m.	NBC	Dual moguls

U.S. GRAND PRIX

Park City, UT – Feb. 5-6

Sat. Feb. 6	6:30 p.m.	NBCSN	Halfpipe Skiing
Sun. Feb. 7	5:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Halfpipe SB
Sat. Feb. 13	4:00 p.m.	NBC	Halfpipe Skiing
Sun. Feb. 14	1:30 p.m.	NBC	Halfpipe SB

BIG AIR AT FENWAY – U.S. GRAND PRIX

Boston, MA – Feb. 11-12

Thu. Feb. 11	8:30 p.m.	NBCSN	Big Air SB LIVE
Fri. Feb. 12	9:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Big Air Skiing LIVE
Sat. Feb. 13	5:00 p.m.	NBC	Big Air

CROSS CUP

Squaw Valley, CA – Mar. 12-13

Sun. Mar. 13	3:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Snowboardcross
Thu. Mar. 17	7:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Skicross
Sat. Mar. 19	1:30 p.m.	NBC	SBX/Skicross

USANA U.S. FREESTYLE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Steamboat Springs, CO – Mar. 17-20

Sun. Mar. 20	5:00 p.m.	NBCSN	Moguls with Aerials highlights

NATURE VALLEY U.S. ALPINE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Sun Valley, ID – Mar. 23-27

Sat. Mar. 26	12:30 p.m.	NBC	Super G

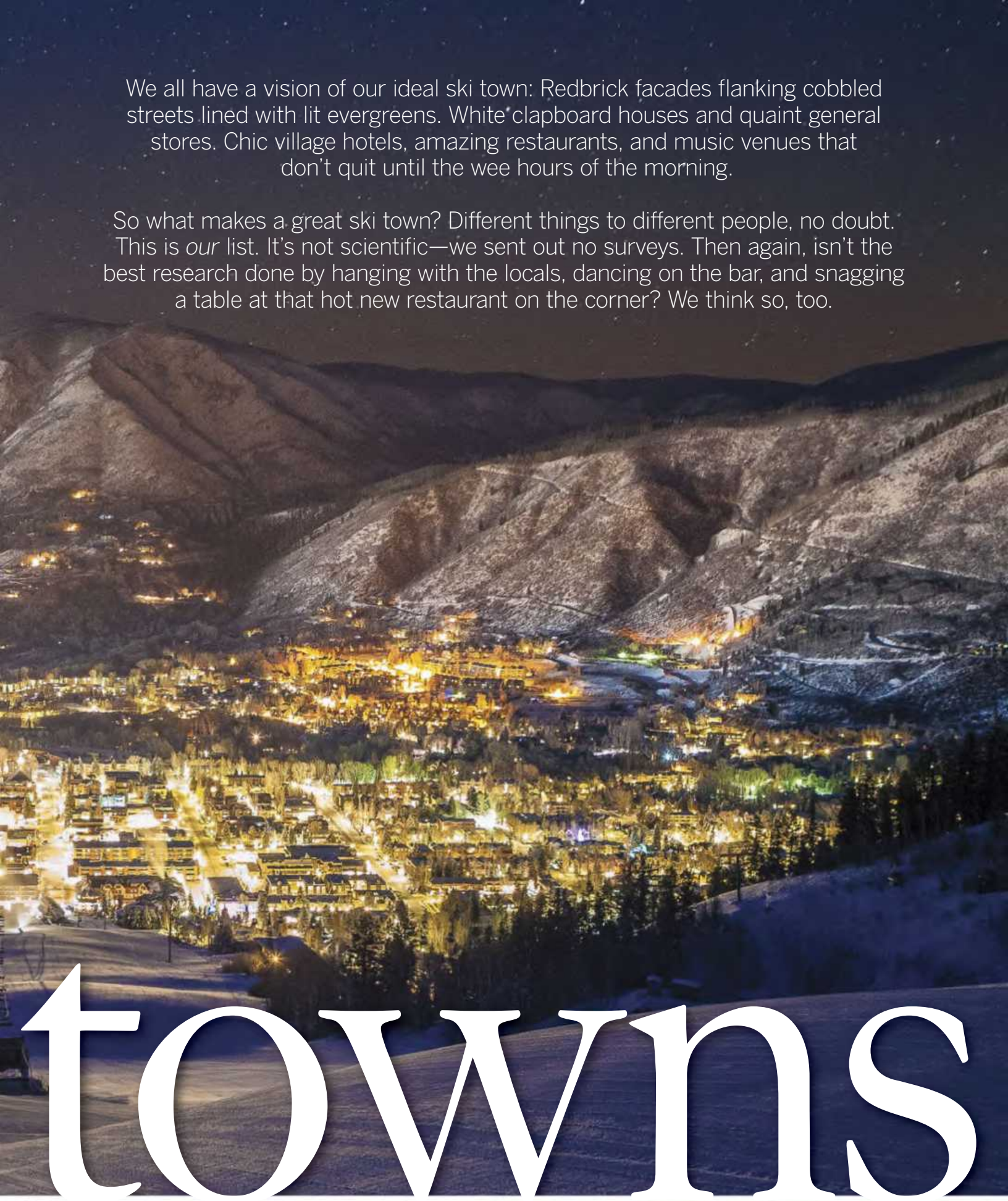
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THE ALL-NEW TACOMA



Life is good at the top: No. 1-ranked Aspen glows golden under the stars.

top { 2015 } Ski

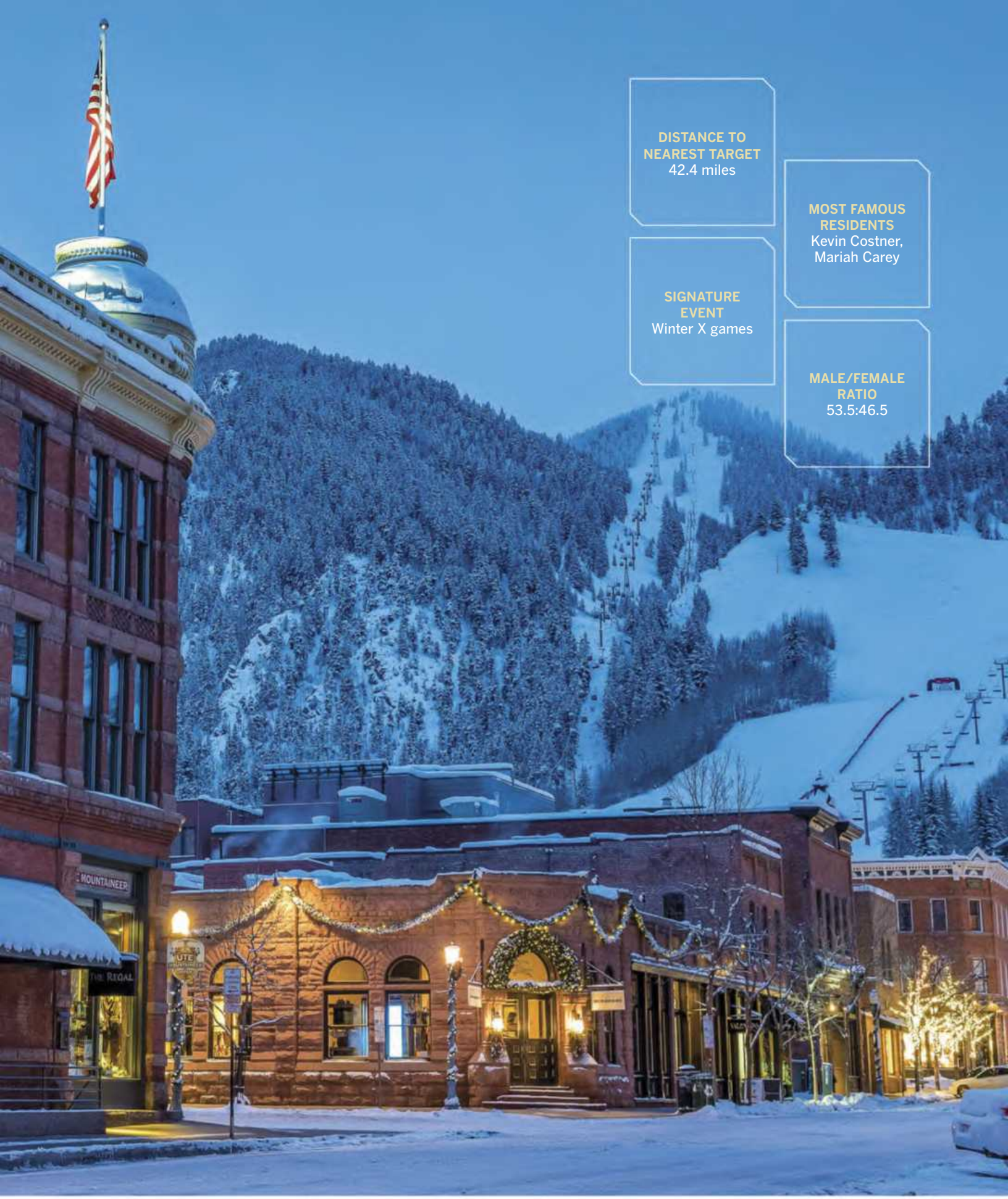


We all have a vision of our ideal ski town: Redbrick facades flanking cobbled streets lined with lit evergreens. White clapboard houses and quaint general stores. Chic village hotels, amazing restaurants, and music venues that don't quit until the wee hours of the morning.

So what makes a great ski town? Different things to different people, no doubt. This is *our* list. It's not scientific—we sent out no surveys. Then again, isn't the best research done by hanging with the locals, dancing on the bar, and snagging a table at that hot new restaurant on the corner? We think so, too.

towns

PHOTOGRAPH BY **CHIP KALBACK**



DISTANCE TO NEAREST TARGET
42.4 miles

MOST FAMOUS RESIDENTS
Kevin Costner, Mariah Carey

SIGNATURE EVENT
Winter X games

MALE/FEMALE RATIO
53.5:46.5

PHOTOGRAPH BY **C2 PHOTOGRAPHY**

{ 2015 TOP SKI TOWNS }

aspen colorado

population: 6,728 // median home price: $4,600,000 // elevation: 7,945 ft.

1

Aspen. It's one of the most riffed-on ski towns out there. From *Aspen Extreme* to *Dumb and Dumber*, *Us Weekly* to *The New York Times*, the widespread image of Aspen is a glitzy celebrity playground, where the billionaires pushed out the millionaires and where no regular Joe could possibly afford to live.

While this stereotype is based in some fact—at least 50 Forbes billionaires have homes here, Paris Hilton and Mariah Carey (among many other celebs) keep the paparazzi well employed, and man-fur is a fashion staple over the holidays—peel back the layers of this 145-year-old former mining town and you'll find a surprisingly diverse society.

The fact that a rad ski mountain rises out of downtown Aspen, and three more are quick, free bus rides away, is enough to attract—and retain—many a ski bum. So while a sizable freshman class comes to town every ski season, equally well represented are older-generation lifestyle-prioritizers, some of whom have abandoned Ph.D.- or MBA-track careers to live the dream, and many of whom hit the slopes and bars with an intensity that belies their age. Ski bums of all ages may be working three jobs to pay their way in this pricey resort, but on a powder morning, no matter the potential wages lost, you'll find them in the gondola line—itself an interesting cross-section of Aspen society.

Then there are the Aspenites who don't ski, the growing number who came for reasons other than the recreational richness. Aspen's vibrant arts and culture scene, for example, comprises dozens of art galleries, a year-round stream of high-caliber performances, a good chunk of Aspen's 200-plus nonprofits, and its new anchor, a $45 million, 33,000-square-foot contemporary art museum housed in a giant latticework cube that stands out in this Victorian and Bauhaus-inspired downtown.

In a town where single-family home prices average $5 million, waiters, plumbers, and ski instructors (and doctors and Realtors) benefit from ski country's oldest and most robust government-subsidized housing program, which covers some 2,800 units. This means a good balance of duct tape and Dior in town after the evening commute—and a particularly civically involved population. Over 97 percent of Pitkin County voters cast ballots in the 2012 election, and Aspen is home to two thriving daily newspapers—never lacking in letters to the editor—plus a mélange of politically diverse columnists, gadflies, and concerned citizens who regularly spout from their soapboxes on the issue du jour.

If there's any place that reflects all the strata of the local society, it's the Thrift Shop of Aspen, a three-story repository of barely worn designer castoffs and an ungodly amount of other unwanted stuff. The Thrift Shop's customer base is everyone in town (there's no real affordable retail otherwise), and Aspen's philanthropic spirit is reflected in the 140 volunteers who work there (all women, most regular Janes). Thrift Shop sales translate to about half a million dollars in scholarships and nonprofit grants doled out annually. Now that's Aspen's wealth going full circle.

—Catherine Lutz



ROSS DOWNARD

{IN WITH THE URBAN: COOLEST SKI CITIES }

vancouver british columbia
A cosmopolitan city with world-class dining, an amazing market (Granville Island Public Market), eclectic neighborhoods (don't miss the Gastown district), and fabulous hotels, Vancouver is well worth an extra few days on either end of a Whistler trip.

salt lake city utah
One of the few North American cities you can use as home base for a ski trip, Salt Lake has enjoyed a renaissance over the past few years that's revitalized the sleepy downtown. Now the dining scene has caught the bug. Check out The Rest, Hub & Spoke, and Current Fish & Oyster.

denver colorado
Yes, pot is legal (and there are dispensaries in almost every neighborhood). But also visit Denver for its up-and-coming dining scene, arts community, and innovative projects like Union Station, an 1881 Amtrak station that's still in use and now boasts restaurants, bars, shops, and the swanky Crawford Hotel.

quebec city quebec
Fortified Old Quebec smacks of—and tastes like—Europe. And the neighborhoods outside the walled city offer glimpses of the revival happening there, from the innovative restaurants to the white-walled galleries. Bring your appetite.

seattle washington
From Pike Place to Pioneer Square, this waterfront city is a great time all year long—with smaller crowds in the winter. A recent technology-company boom has the money flowing in; you can see its ripples in the new hotels, restaurants, and markets.

{ 2015 TOP SKI TOWNS }

telluride

colorado

population: 2,319 // median home price: $1,02,000 // elevation: 8,750 ft.



2

Telluride High School still calls its athletes the Miners, though the last gold was extracted decades ago. Wherever you go in Telluride, mining gets in your face. Riding the gondola, one can scan east to west from the ginormous, treacherously toxic tailings pile to the pickax-stuffed museum in town. Me, I'm over the mining heritage. In the end, it's just a bunch of rusted metal.

Truth is, we may as well call our athletes the Telluride Stoners. After all, Telluride was invaded by hippies in the '70s, elected a libertarian who as sheriff wrote a book condemning the War on Drugs, and voted for legal marijuana in a 4:1 landslide. Weed influences our culture every bit as much as ore. Pot tourism (our little town boasts four dispensaries!) drew thousands of New Mexicans, Arizonans, and Texans here in early 2014, before a dispensary opened two hours south in Durango. No matter. The skiers among them returned this winter, when the resort enjoyed a record 478,000 skier visits.

And why not? Telluride is the most beautiful place you'll ever ski. The Alps-like San Juan Mountains plummet right down to Victorian architecture so lovely the town's been designated a National Historic Landmark District. Colorado Avenue, a.k.a. Main Street, bustles with shops, taverns, and restaurants. Wedged tight in a cozy box canyon, Telluride in the '70s considered, but eventually declined, a motion to follow Zermatt's lead and forbid automobiles. Still, it's eminently walkable; the 12-by-eight-block core remains the quaint size it was when Butch Cassidy arrived to rob his first bank.

Stroll the byways between Telluride's named streets. Alleys are where locals walk when they don't want to be bothered by traffic…or bosses and relatives. It's where you'll find the cutest dogs, funkiest apartments, and most creative found art. If Colorado Avenue is Telluride's face, the alleys are its soul.

Once the first chairlift started spinning in 1972, Telluride became the ultimate ski town. For one thing, lifts rise directly from town. To be a great ski town one needs great snow, and Telluride's is perfection. The San Juans are the steepest range in Colorado and among the tallest, with the highest concentration of fourteeners in the Lower 48. On the signature run, See Forever, we peer deep into the redrock canyons surrounding Moab, Utah. The views stun—when they're not busy astounding.

From the highest lift, at 12,570 feet, we drop 3,845 vertical feet to the gondola plaza—which is, of course, decorated with mining structures. Bringing us back to the Telluride Miners. Can we move on already? Please, Telluride High, dump the musty Miners moniker and do what Aspen High did in the 1950s: rename your athletes the Skiers.
—Rob Story

READER picks



{ BEST CHEAP EATS }

Bike and Bean

Ellicottville, New York

Delish burritos, easy on the wallet, in a full-service bike shop. Sounds good to us.



{ BEST DIVE BAR }

The Bierstube

Whitefish, Montana

This kinda grubby yet iconic watering hole is a must-visit for every Whitefish skier.

MOVIE FILMED HERE
The Hateful Eight (2015)

MILES TO THE AIRPORT
5.3

FAMOUS RESIDENT
Oprah

SIGNATURE FESTIVAL
Telluride Bluegrass Festival

THUMBNAILS, FROM LEFT: COLTON WRIGHT; CRAIG MOORE/GLACIERWORLD; TRENT BONA; COURTESY OF SUGARLOAF/JAMIE WALTER



{ BEST COFFEEHOUSE }

Camp 4 Coffee

Crested Butte, Colorado

The tiny cabin plastered with colorful license plates serves the best coffee in town. Who knew?



{ BEST FESTIVAL }

Reggae Fest

Sugarloaf, Maine

Great music, a fun crowd, and perfect spring weather to soak it all in.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF **RYAN BONNEAU**

{ 2015 TOP SKI TOWNS }

jackson

wyoming

population: 10,135 // median home price: $547,800 // elevation: 6,237 ft.



PHOTOGRAPH BY **BOB WOODALL/FOCUS PRODUCTIONS**

FAMOUS RESIDENT
Harrison Ford

DISTANCE TO NEAREST TARGET
88 miles

LOCAL EVENT
Jackson Town Downhill



3

Jackson Hole is a pretty serious place. It starts with the ski area's terrain, which is gnarly enough that the management posts huge signs at the top and bottom of the Tram warning people to take it easy or they might get killed. Still, every season, waves of hotshot ex–ski racers arrive, ready to secure a spot in the next TGR movie or score a badge to the secret society that's based on an ability to duck ropes and huck off cliffs. The ones who survive their first season merge into the general population, which is probably the fittest anywhere. Jackson has 32 registered gyms for a population of 10,000—everything from power-yoga studios to industrial warehouses where people take turns dragging scrap iron across the floor. And those don't attract the more stoic types who train by chasing down wolf packs in the surrounding wilderness wearing only surf trunks, sneakers, and their toddler in a baby carrier. In other words, don't get in a local's way. (A few years back, one guy on a popular backcountry bootpack was literally grabbed from behind and hurled aside because he was moving too slowly.) Another piece of advice: Don't follow tracks if you are new in town; a lot of the runs end in 300-foot cliffs, which the locals more or less ski.

The best advice for skiing here is to take a warmup ski vacation someplace in Colorado before your actual ski vacation in Jackson Hole. Then when you get to Jackson, hire a guide. He or she can tour you around the famous terrain on both sides of the ropes, point you into the couloirs between the cliffs, and usher you to the front of the line for Jackson Hole's famous Tram. After which, you very well might get beat up. Don't worry. It'll be worth it.

The town of Jackson is known for its dismally poor male-to-female ratio during the winter. Guys, if you don't like your 7:1 odds, well, too bad.

In January, a.k.a. "Manuary," your Tinder feed will simply flash an error message. Brought a date with you? (This is a good plan.) The valley's best food is at Teton Thai, at the resort—there's no wait at lunch. Later, amuse yourselves by touring Jackson's cheesy art galleries ($10,000 for a bronze statuette of a sexy cowgirl bathing in a horse trough?), and then duck into the famous Cowboy Bar on the Town Square. After a few whiskeys, that same artwork and Western kitsch looks a lot better. And the bands aren't half bad either, providing you appreciate Waylon Jennings tunes and can swing dance. In other words, good luck out there. —*Frederick Reimers*

READER picks



{ BEST SKI-TOWN BEER }
Switchback
Burlington, Vermont
Take a tour and sip samples and pints in the tap room.



FROM LEFT: KERI BASCETTA; COURTESY OF SWITCHBACK BREWERY



{ GREAT MOUNTAINS THAT NEED TOWNS }

copper colorado
Such a great ski mountain…but wouldn't it be great to relax with a cold one in a decent space (read: not a cafeteria or sports bar) without having to load up the car? We think so too.

big sky montana
While the Boyne-manufactured "village" at the base can sleep a gazillion skiers, it's far from quaint. We'd love to see something akin to Meadows Village, Big Sky's de facto town 20 minutes down the road, come in at the base.

snowbasin utah
The resort has all the makings of an amazing ski vacation—except the whole place shuts down after 5 p.m. Build a true village here, and Snowbasin would rule.

loveland colorado
So much to love here—the hike-to terrain off the ridge, the amazing above-treeline skiing at 13,000 feet, the intermediate-friendly bowls. What's less enjoyable is the total absence of amenities at the base.

killington vermont
The resort's service road is, admittedly, a helluva service road. But the Beast—and its devoted legions of skiers—would greatly benefit from a dedicated town or village at its base in which to slake their thirst and fill their bellies after a day pounding the famous moguls.

{ 2015 TOP SKI TOWNS }

whistler

british columbia

population: 9,824 // median home price: $1,315,000 // elevation: 2,214 ft.

4

No fear. **Sure, it was a** cheesy clothing brand in the '90s, but it sums up Whistler in two simple words. It began with its founders, who hacked for days through coastal rainforest and swamp just to get to the bottom of a 6,000-foot behemoth, and endured unto Intrawest, which brilliantly predicted that high-speed lifts to the top of snow-pummeled peaks would, in the end, let them sell opulent timber-frame weekend chalets for millions a pop.

The weed- and LSD-fueled counterculture ski bums who first starting dropping the wild backcountry lines offered up by



CELEBRITY SPOTTING
Heidi Klum, Hugh Jackman

VILLAGE POPULATION ON A BUSY WINTER DAY
50,000

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF KEYSTONE/BOB WINSETT; MIKE CRANE: COURTESY OF DAYLIGHT DONUTS; CASEY DAY

READER picks

{ BEST KID DIVERSION }
Adventure Point tubing
Keystone, Colorado
Fast, fun, and lift-served with a warming yurt and even night tubing under the lights.



{ BEST BREAKFAST BURRITO }
Daylight Donuts
Breckenridge, Colorado
The homemade green-chile burrito is where it's at.



{ BEST PLACE TO TAILGATE }
The Beach
Arapahoe Basin, Colorado
Don't forget the grill and camping chairs.



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{ COOLEST TOWNS TO MOVE TO }

durango colorado
Blessed by its location in the eye-popping San Juans, Durango is big enough to offer a way to make a living (population: 18,000) yet small enough to retain its mountain-town charm, with skiing nearby at Durango Mountain Resort, friendly locals crisscrossing the city on two wheels, and an entrepreneurial vibe that welcomes small businesses.

whitefish montana
Plenty to do all year round, an attractive downtown with lots of potential, a ski resort seven miles from the main drag, and no sales tax all conspire to make Whitefish a real contender for those looking for the simpler life.



portland maine
This southern Maine town surrounded by the Atlantic on three sides is known for its friendly locals, clean living, and decent housing costs. Skiers have their pick of Sunday River, two hours away, or mighty Sugarloaf, two and a half hours.

ogden utah
While Ogden isn't your typical quaint ski town, this adventure hot spot of 84,000 has other perks, such as a whitewater park right downtown; the Salomon Center, with indoor skydiving and climbing; and Snowbasin and Powder Mountain, 30 minutes up the canyon.

bend oregon
This central Oregon town attracts families, retirees, and entrepreneurs who want to enjoy the cultural scene, craft beers, and innovative dining balanced by outdoor pursuits, such as skiing at Mt. Bachelor, 20 miles away.

Whistler's expanding lift system in the late '80s weren't afraid either. Not of the cops, not of hotboxing the "ganjala," nor of the giant cornices and wicked avalanches that come with over 40 feet of snowfall a year. The fact that Whistler Village, which as recently as the mid-1980s was a black-bear-infested dump, didn't scare them either, though it was no easy task building one of North America's first replicas of a European ski village, this one eventually to be complete with Lululemon concept stores, raging nightclubs, iced-in vodka cellars, and over-the-top restaurants where sommeliers saber the tops off of the champagne bottles.

Of course, fearlessness isn't always a good thing. Whistler Search and Rescue regularly hauls flocks of flatlanders from the deep backcountry. Either the ill-fated newbies followed tracks of locals beneath boundary ropes, or the call of untouched pow was just too strong. They often freeze to death, or, perhaps more tragically, they're extricated with drawers full of poop (it's called the New Jersey hot pack—true story).

Whistler groms are a special breed, with patroller parents who start taking them on sweeps of the slopes before their tenth birthdays. When cork-sevens get to be dull as dishwater for these kids, sphincter-clenching chutes like Friday the 13th and Exhilaration become easy warmups for the huge backcountry objectives they'll soon be lapping. Think Mount Fissile's Psycho Chute, or Blackcomb Peak's DOA. All this well before they even finish middle school.

This town isn't afraid to send it through the après either. Inebriated internationals clunking through the village in sweat-pooled ski boots at 1 a.m. on a Tuesday are de rigueur. Since the party heyday of the '90s, when clubs like the Savage Beagle and Tommy Africa's ruled with go-go dancers and the babe-to-dude ratio was unparalleled in the ski universe, you've always had to be on the lookout for the "Whistler itch." Sorry for the TMI.

Fifty-million-dollar Peak 2 Peak Gondola? Whatever. Alpine bowls riddled with cliffs, chutes, and closeouts? Why not? More shops than you could visit in a lifetime? Get them in there. This is Whistler, and Whistler isn't like any other place on earth. It's where you go to be a rock star or die trying (or just seriously maim yourself). It's where you go to spend all your money. That one true place where you can ski, *really ski,* until your heart is brimming with contentment. Until tomorrow, that is.

—Mitchell Scott

FROM LEFT: DAVE CLEAVELAND; REUBEN KRABBE



LOCAL EVENT
Westbeach
Chinese Downhill

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P. Pastore • Ridgefield, CT

Photo courtesy of Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing

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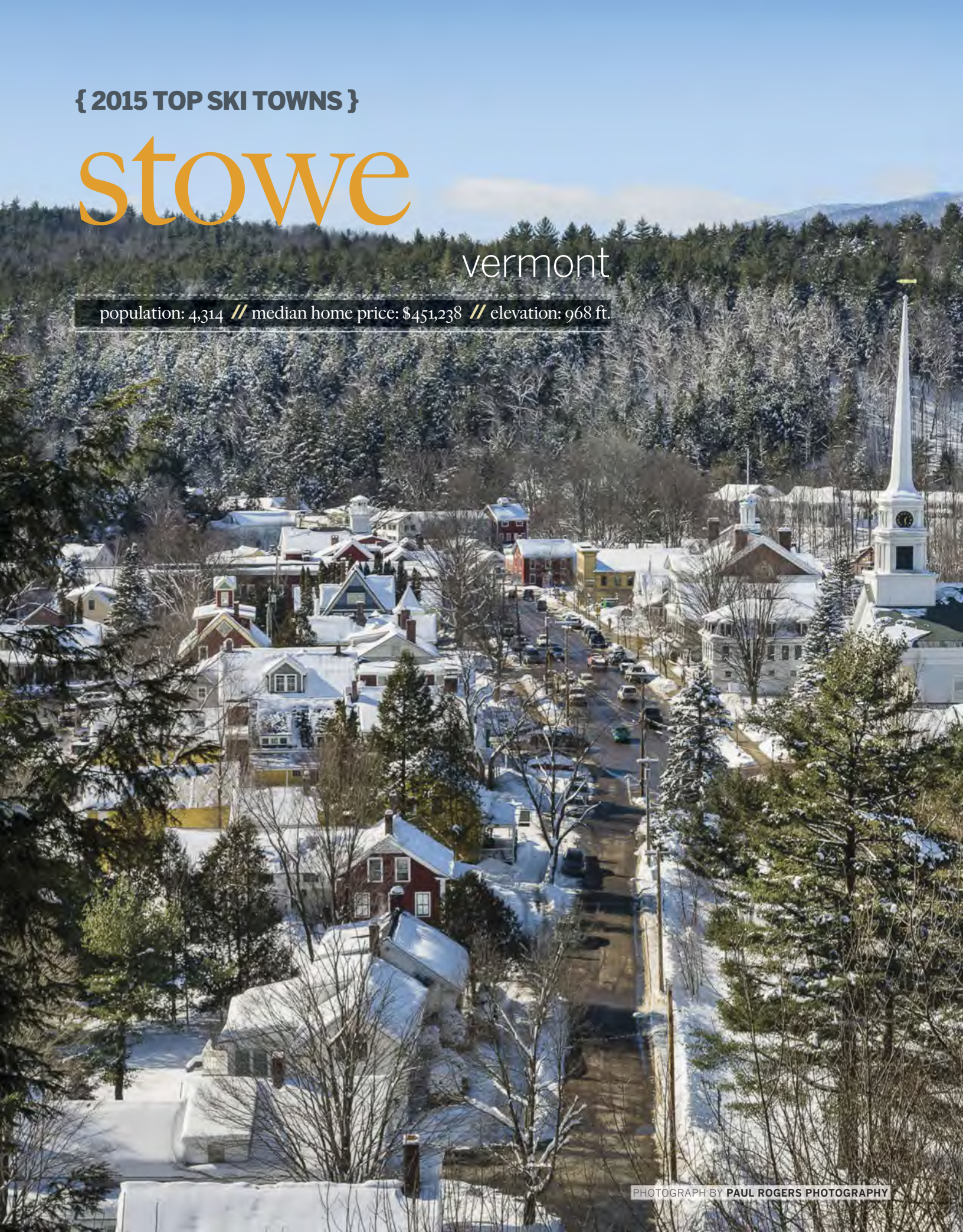
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{ 2015 TOP SKI TOWNS }

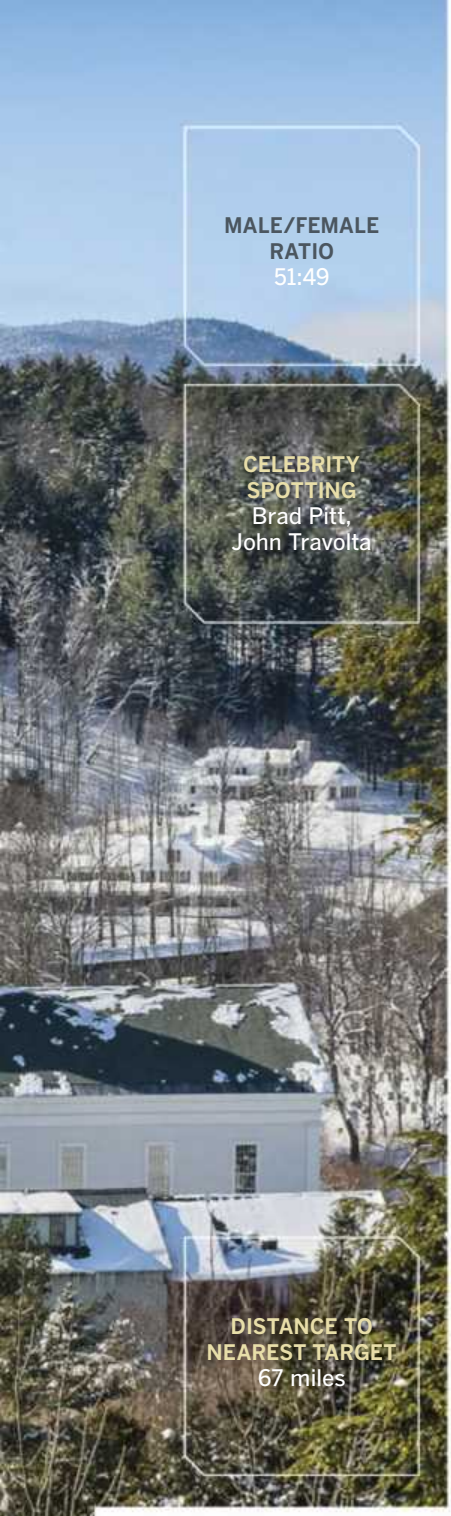
stowe

vermont

population: 4,314 // median home price: $451,238 // elevation: 968 ft.



PHOTOGRAPH BY **PAUL ROGERS PHOTOGRAPHY**



MALE/FEMALE RATIO
51:49

CELEBRITY SPOTTING
Brad Pitt, John Travolta

DISTANCE TO NEAREST TARGET
67 miles

BRIAN NEVINS

For anyone who grew up in small-town Vermont, the quaint village feels familiar even today.

5

It could be argued that Sugarbush serves up the best bucolic beauty in Vermont. If powder's your game, Jay Peak claims the highest snowfall totals in the state. Many a diehard skier swears on his kids' rock skis that Mad River has more challenging terrain and better tree skiing than Stowe. Killington offers far more skiable acreage, Whiteface has more vert, and Tremblant has a more vibrant slopeside scene.

But does any place in Vermont, or in the East, put together all the key ingredients—the village, the scenery, the terrain, the snow, the amenities—the way Stowe does?

Certainly no ski town in the East has a richer history. It was just another white-clapboard New England farm-and-forestry community when the skiers arrived in the 1930s. Because the sport was so new then, Wall Street investment banker Roland Palmedo and his Manhattan buddies had their pick of Vermont's mountainsides to develop. Naturally they picked the biggest one, magnificent snowcapped Mount Mansfield.

As new resorts opened in ensuing decades—at one point Vermont had some 70 ski areas—other resorts eclipsed the original in size and skier visits. But Stowe somehow never lost its place as the "ski capital of the East."

And nostalgia is a big part of the charm. For anyone who grew up in small-town Vermont, the quaint village feels familiar even today—the Colonial-style church, the creaky floorboards of Main Street's stores, the listing, lichened marble monuments in the riverside cemetery, the smell of leaf meal and wood smoke. During the boom years, development got a little crazy. But just before things got too strippy, residents woke up and tightened their zoning laws, so the Mountain Road is still a pleasant drive on a cold snowy morning, its shops and restaurants smartly clustered, its open spaces wisely preserved.

Perfect? No. Like any ski town, or any Vermont village, it can be a little dull in the shoulder months—Mud Season in the late spring, Stick Season in the late fall. The cost of living has long since driven out most of the town's multi-generation families. And the super-rich keep building handsome mansions in pastures and maple groves, not bothering to actually live in them for more than a few weeks a year.

But lots of Stowe locals can't imagine living anywhere else. They're the cast of characters who animate Stowe and give the town its sense of place. Season after season, you see the same faces greeting each other on village sidewalks, whooping it up in liftlines, turning out to vote on Town Meeting Day. They make the place real, rather than resorty—as real as it was before Palmedo and his cohorts showed up in the '30s. Sure, it's a ski town. But it's also just a town.

So for all the farm-to-table restaurants, rowdy bars, high-end shops, and fancy lodges, maybe that's what makes it most appealing. Yes, skiing is the common denominator, and the place knows how to share its stoke with visiting skiers. But there's more to Stowe than that. And that makes all the difference. —*Joe Cutts*

{ ADVENTURE TOWNS }

north conway
new hampshire

True, the outlet malls and chain restaurants don't scream authenticity. But you'll be hard-pressed to find a better location for all your winter—and summer—pursuits than this town in the heart of the White Mountains, surrounded by Granite State beauty.

hood river
oregon

Hood River is geographically blessed, sitting at the crossroads of the Cascades and the Columbia River Gorge. From skiing at Mt. Hood Meadows to windsurfing on the Columbia, adrenaline seekers will find it here pretty much any time of year.

powder highway towns
british columbia

Golden, Nelson, and Revelstoke, in addition to being the gateways to some of the best stoke in the province, offer a dose of local culture with their authentic main streets, fun bars, and decent eats. Check 'em out, eh?

copper harbor
michigan

Located on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, next to Midwest powder-skiing capital Mount Bohemia (which happens to be opening a cat-skiing operation this year), Copper Harbor also serves up sweet summer mountain biking and trail running.

girdwood
alaska

Name the town in Alaska where you can ski at a resort as well as from a snowcat and a helicopter. Yep, tiny, funky Girdwood, home to Alyeska Resort, is a base camp for all things skiing, as well as a summertime hiking and downhill mountain-biking mecca.



park city

utah

population: 7,962 // median home price: $1,340,000 // elevation: 6,900 ft.

6

There's been lots of news coming out of Park City over the past few years, from the much-contested One Wasatch proposal, which would connect many of Utah's resorts by chairlifts or gondolas, to Vail's 2014 purchase of Park City Mountain Resort and its ultra-long-term lease of The Canyons next door—a nearly $500 million investment. All this money has blown into town. A big fat cloud of it. So Park City must be radically different now, right? This just can't be same charming, authentic place it's always been, can it?

Actually it can. To be sure, the town smelled of luxury before Vail got involved. Want to tip heavily? Check into The St. Regis. Or The Waldorf Astoria. Or The Montage. The joint is lousy with hot stones and eucalyptus. But the best thing about Park City is still (and always has been) its roots. The town's pretty, dirty past is still present. High West Distillery & Saloon, for example, was carved out of a 19th-century livery and serves some of the town's best lunches and dinners. Plus it's the world's only ski-in, ski-out distillery, which has obvious perils. Sober up on the slow, fixed-grip Town lift, just two ski lengths from High West.

Walk historic Main Street—which, mercifully, has bounced back from a near-fatal T-shirt shop/real estate office/antler-art takeover—to browse world-class art galleries (Gallery Mar, Terzian Galleries, and the Meyer Gallery), glam restaurants (Silver, Fletcher's), and a booming music scene at the brand-new O.P. Rockwell.

The truth is, Park City's roots run so deep, it'll take more than Vail's influence to shake things up. Need proof? Belly up to the bar at the No Name Saloon, where there's a party seven nights a week and the same 10 guys have been sitting on the same 10 barstools for the last 30 years. And don't miss the Egyptian Theater, the classic mining-era entertainment emporium that now hosts hilariously decent local theater.

It's a robust, year-round community that keeps Main Street real. But Park City locals know there are others who help things along. Like the PIBs—the "People in Black" who up the town's cool factor when they invade with the Sundance Film Festival for a fortnight in mid-January. Great movies, great parties, Redford sightings…and empty runs. During Sundance, the pistes look like the Long Island Expressway during Passover.

Local grumbling about gentrification aside, all admit it's still beautiful in Park City—the closeness of the canyons, the three amazing ski resorts, and the 400 miles of hiking and biking trails in the lovely summer season. The next few years will be interesting as Vail goes from polite new houseguest to complacent local, but we'd wager it'll be nothing that resilient Park City can't handle.
—Carrie Sheinberg



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: TIM BROWN; COURTESY OF PARK CITY MOUNTAIN RESORT/DAN CAMPBELL; COURTESY OF WHISTLER BLACKCOMB/MATT WALKER; ISTOCKPHOTO; JUSTIN OLSEN

It's a robust, year-round community that keeps Main Street real.



{ BEST PLACE TO HOOK UP }

Anywhere if you're a girl.

Sorry, guys.

Male/female ratios are not on your side, boys. But hey, the skiing is fine.



{ BEST BLOODY MARY }

The Mill

Mammoth, California

It's a drink. It's a meal. It's a meal that gets you drunk. It's all good.

READER picks



{ NEXT BEST TOWNS }

red lodge montana

A quaint town lined with local shops and cafés, Red Lodge is also home to its own 2,400-vertical-foot mountain with an impressive 65 trails in beautiful Custer National Forest. When the snow is good, this hidden gem is sure to please.

pittsfield massachusetts

Known more for industry than skiing, Pittsfield is enjoying a revival of sorts with a chic new downtown hotel, a growing arts district, and a booming restaurant scene of 20 eateries in downtown's quarter-mile stretch. Check out District Kitchen & Bar.

sandpoint idaho

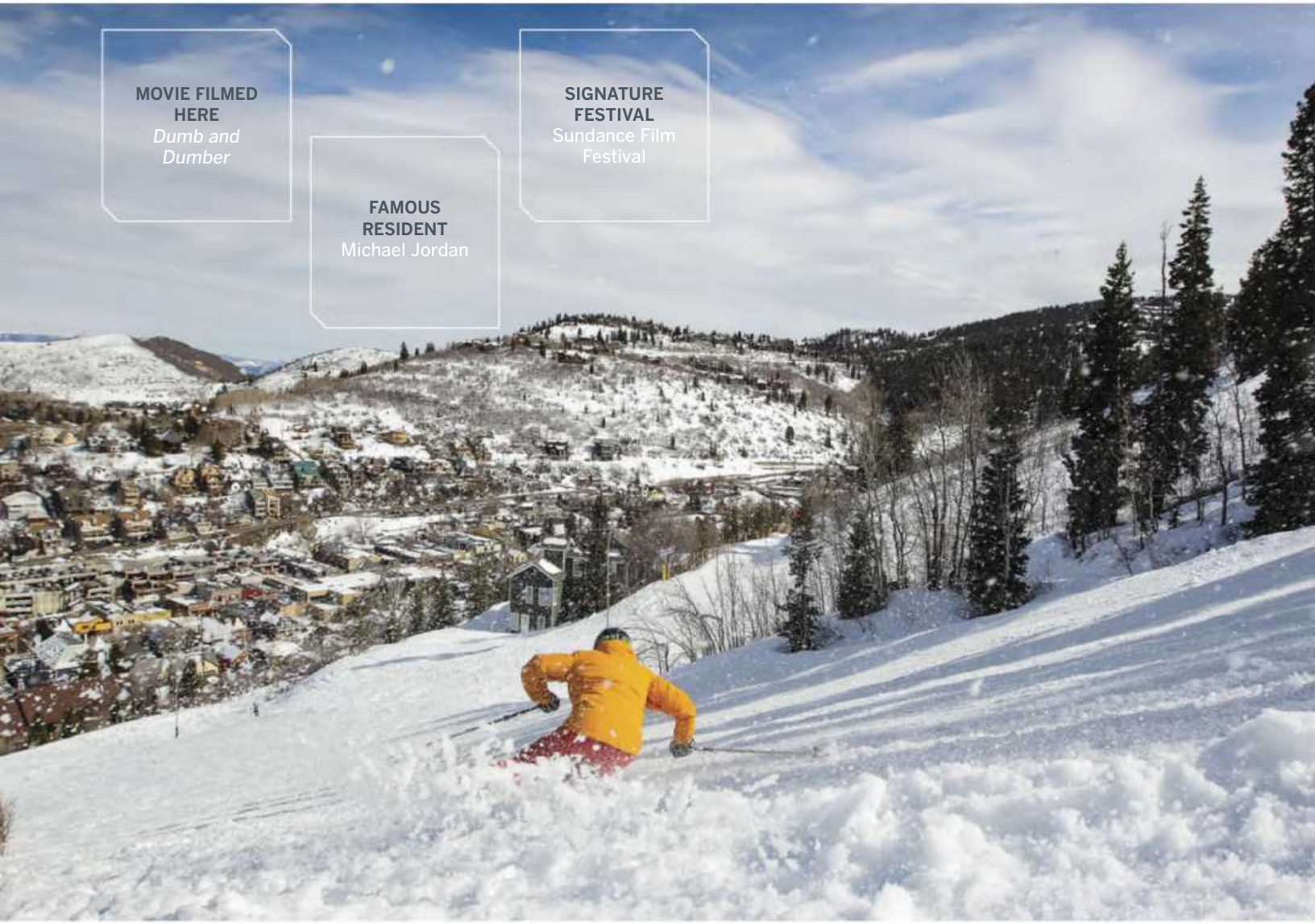
Sandpoint, 60 miles from the Canadian border, is surprisingly accessible—90 minutes from the Spokane airport and served by Amtrak. Schweitzer skiers enjoy Sandpoint's laid-back vibe and great amenities—sushi bars, tapas restaurants, coffee shops—after a day in the resort's amazing glades.

salida colorado

While Monarch Mountain is about 20 miles from fun, funky Salida, staying there is worth the effort. This old railroad town's historic district offers up art galleries, cafés, and bars, and the pursuits in the surrounding 14,000-foot peaks span the seasons.

lebanon new hampshire

The recently completed Northern Rail Trail—the longest multiuse path in the state—crisscrosses the Mascoma River in this lovely burg one town over from Dartmouth College. It even has its own little ski area, Storrs Hill, a half-mile from the town center.



{ BEST PLACE TO SPEND CHRISTMAS }

Taos, New Mexico



Farolitos in the town square in front of old adobe homes and storefronts... Christmastime in Taos is magical.

{ MOST ARROGANT LOCALS }

Alta, Utah



Sorry, Alta. We love you. But, says one reader: "It's called the Alta-tude for a reason."

{ FRIENDLIEST LOCALS }

Whitefish, Montana



Authentic. Genuine. Down-to-earth. All words commonly used to describe folks who live in this northern Montana ski town. We hear they'll even ski with you on a powder day. And that's something.

{ BEST PLACE FOR LIVE MUSIC }

Belly Up

Aspen, Colorado



There's not a bad seat in the house at this three-level underground venue with room for 500. The varied talent that plays here includes The Reverend Horton Heat and Twenty-One Pilots.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MICHAEL DEYOUNG; ADAM BARKER; COURTESY OF BELLY UP ASPEN/MICHAEL GOLDBERG; CRAIG MOORE/GLACIERWORLD


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COURTESY OF VAIL RESORTS/JACK AFFLECK

{ 2015 TOP SKI TOWNS }

vail

colorado

population: 5,311 // median home price: $2,400,000 // elevation: 8,120 ft.

7

Pete Seibert, a veteran of the 10th Mountain Division, needed $1 million or so in 1961 to build his life's vision of the ultimate ski resort. He put together a package for investors: $10,000 got you shares in the unbuilt resort and four lifetime season passes for the family. For $500 more, you'd get a lot for a home site in what was then

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scenic sheep pastures high in the Colorado Rockies. Like just about everything to do with Vail, it turned out to be a damn good investment.

A majority of the top mountain destinations (Aspen, Telluride, Park City, and such) were frontier towns first; the charming ski resorts came later. Vail, in contrast, turned the ski industry upside down: ski resort first, then the town grew around it. And boy, did Vail grow. From Gold Peak to Vail Village (the town square, if you will) to West Vail, the community has expanded so much that each area has its own personality. It's become a ski metropolis with distinct neighborhoods. There may not be another community in the mountains that so deftly does the destination jujitsu of combining the thrill of outdoor athletics with the buzz of a booming urban environment. The Aspen valley, by comparison, now seems downright quaint.

The Vail experience is a skier's Rorschach test. Do you see Colorado deep-blue skies, endless untracked turns in the Back Bowls, and an animated urban-village vibe, or I-70 traffic jams, jostling crowds, and ersatz Bavarian storefronts? As they say, skiers vote with their skis, with a Yogi Berra-ism coming to mind: No one goes there anymore; it's too crowded.

The haters are going to hate, dusting off the tired Disneyland-on-snow trope. But honestly, that's not fair to Vail. Families outgrow Disney. The key to Vail is that you grow *into* the experience. You figure out how to avoid the mosh-pit start to your ski day and quickly learn to make tracks where others don't. You identify your favorite après and dining spots, and you discover new options, which seemingly appear every year with the first frost. To help you get around, the town of Vail operates what it says is the biggest free transportation system in the country. Who knows if it's really the biggest, but it is free and it does work. Vail may not be skiing's soul, but it sure is its playground.

The key to Vail is that you grow *into* the experience.

In synch with the booming linear town at its base, Vail Mountain very well might be the biggest mountain most skiers will ever ski. Seven miles across, with 5,300 acres, it's a massive blank canvas upon which to paint your ski dreams. Yes, it is a bit light on ski-movie steeps, but ski-resort visitors are a bit light on being ski-movie athletes.

Crested Butte ran a series of poke-in-the-rib ads in this magazine in the early 2000s with the tagline "This is Not Vail." One ad featured a photo of young partiers piled into a car with the copy "You can tell because the car is too old, and the people are having too much fun."

That was more than a decade ago, before Vail was the sprawling, teeming, ever-changing, and ever-expanding destination of today. You won't be seeing a "This is Not Vail" slogan again anytime soon; it's too preposterous. Ski communities avoid comparing themselves to Vail these days. No one else is Vail. No one else *can* be Vail. There's no need to draw attention to the obvious.

—Greg Ditrinco



{TOWNS WORTH THE DETOUR}

carbondale colorado
Those priced out of Aspen move to Carbondale, 30 miles away, and open chic restaurants, appealing boutiques, and even a sweet new distillery (see Scene, page 40) on its cute main street. Also, give Basalt a quick peek, 15 miles out of Aspen, even just for Café Bernard's famous Morning Buns.

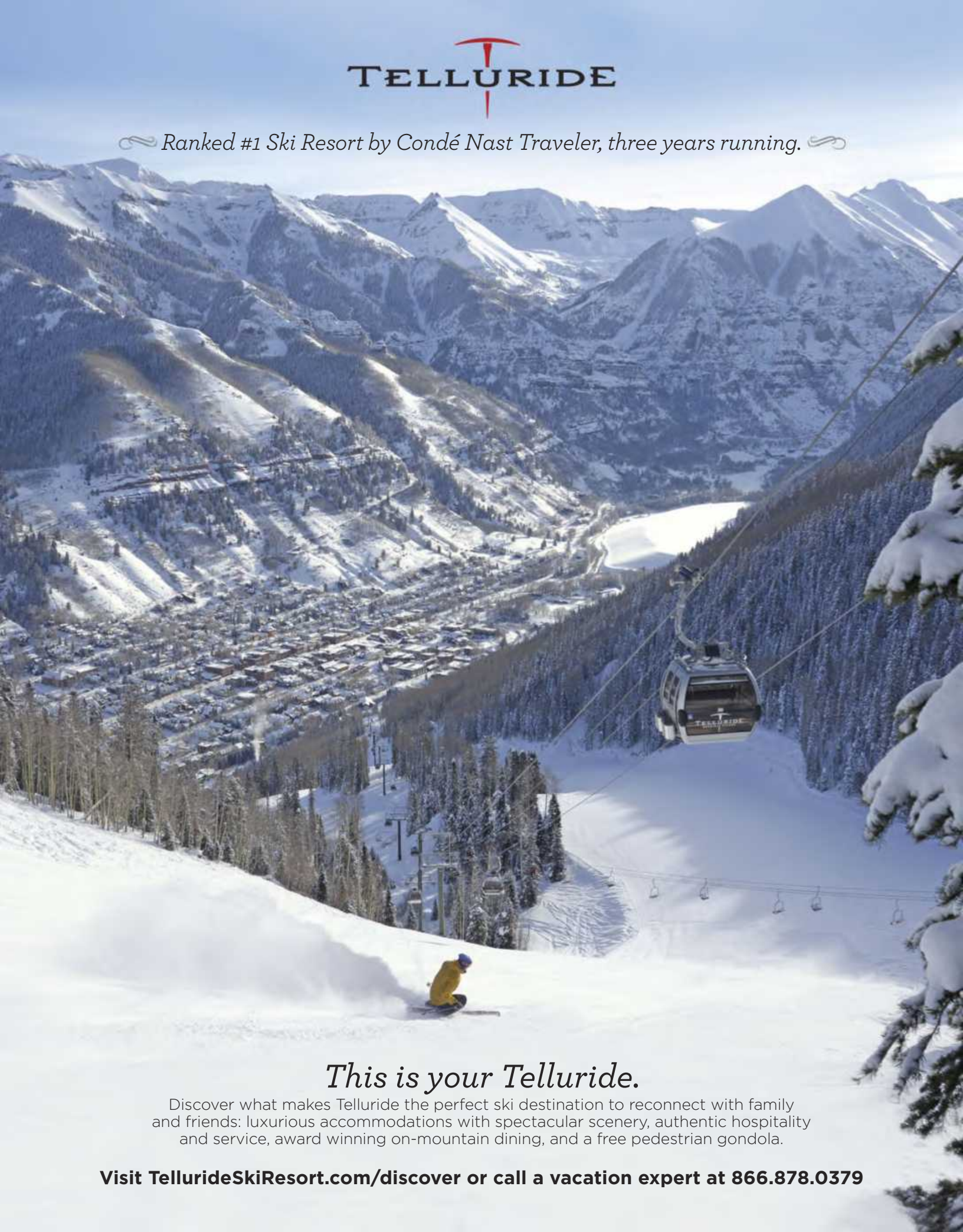
hailey idaho
With more good restaurants than a town of its size deserves, little Hailey, just 12 miles south of Sun Valley, makes for a tasty outing. One of the best is CK's Real Food, on Main Street.

ouray colorado
It's not called the "Switzerland of Colorado" for nothin'. A visit to Ouray is worth the hour's drive from Telluride for the views alone, but do soak in the hot springs while you're there.

saranac lake new york
Ten miles from Lake Placid—a bike trail is actually being constructed between the two—Saranac Lake is a charming little town near the three serene Saranac Lakes that's become a great alternative to the Adirondack tourist hubs nearby.

edwards colorado
This quiet community 15 miles from Vail's bustle feels like another time zone. The quaint Riverwalk is where all the action is: eclectic shops and cafés. Try Juniper, owned by the folks behind Vail's Sweet Basil and Mountain Standard.

FROM TOP: JEFF CRICCO; BILLY DORAN PHOTOGRAPHICS


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ketchum

idaho

population: 2,706 // median home price: $669,400 // elevation: 5,853 ft.



COURTESY OF VISIT SUN VALLEY/TAL ROBERTS

8

Legend has it there's an unidentified Union Pacific rail worker on the Boise line to thank for finding one of the country's great ski towns, Ketchum, Idaho. Granted, an Austrian count by the name of Schaffgotsch, commissioned by U.P. rail baron Averill Harriman, generally gets the credit. He spent the winter of 1935–36 traveling the Western U.S. in search of a site for the perfect destination ski resort. But it was this forgotten yard worker or conductor who gave the count the tip, telling him the Ketchum spur racked up the largest snow-removal bill of the entire line. And so it goes: The rich and famous write the headlines, but the quirky, passionate locals add the color. Despite its "nation's first destination resort" upbringing and A-list clientele, it's this arrangement, a culture driven by nearly eight decades of skiers dedicated to little more than the feeling of a face shot or a well-carved turn rather than big money, that's kept the heart of this off-the-beaten-path town beating.

SO GOOD YOU'LL PITCH A TENT.



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In an era when megaresorts are hell-bent on maximizing the number of lifts, acres, on-mountain restaurants, and adventure zones, Ketchum keeps things relatively simple. On Bald Mountain, which rises almost directly out of downtown, it's all about high-speed-lift-served vertical, over 3,000 lightning-fast feet of it on exquisitely manicured groomers. Natural snow can be fickle, yet the mountain's state-of-the-art snowmaking system keeps things buffed. With few crowds on Baldy, except during the obvious holiday weekends, you can fly down the mountain—one of the reasons ski bums love to winter here. There are more beautiful skiers on Baldy than anywhere on the planet, and the town race series is the World Cup of beer leagues. When pretty much everyone in town can set an edge and drag a hip, there are no bad ski days. Just bad tunes.

It's this "make turns, not war" mentality that drew industry icons like Bob Smith, of goggle fame, Ed Scott, of pole fame, Bobbie Burns, of hotdog fame, and Warren Miller, skiing's original dirtbag, to the area. Here skiing has always been the most relevant topic of conversation and a surefire way to identify with the stranger a few barstools down. You can still experience parts of Ketchum in the same manner as those legends every time you grab lunch at the Roundhouse (est. 1939), poach the famous circular Sun Valley Lodge hot tubs (est. 1936), feast on a 22-ounce cowboy-cut steak at the Pioneer Saloon (est. 1940), or sip late-night whiskey and water at the Casino Club (est. 1920). History has been Ketchum's calling card, perhaps to a fault, given the prevailing hairline in town. But it's also something that new lifts, restaurants, spas, and condos—the metrics other ski-town marketing departments like to hype—can't even begin to re-create. *—Kevin Luby*



{ MOST DOG-FRIENDLY TOWN }
Telluride, Colorado
"Puppy parking" outside of shops along the main drag? C'mon. Telluride, thanks for being so awesome.



{ BEST MARGARITA }
Pica's Mexican Taqueria
Jackson, Wyoming
And kickass chips and guac to accompany.



READER picks

The rich and famous write the headlines, but the quirky, passionate locals provide the color.



{ TOWNS THAT ALMOST MADE THE TOP 10. ALMOST. }

ellicottville
new york

Readers *lurve* Ellicottville, as evidenced by the high scores they give Holiday Valley, its 290-acre ski hill, during our Reader Resort Survey. (No. 3 in the East this year.) It's a fun town, but not well-rounded enough to compete with the big guys. Yet.

steamboat
colorado

No. 11? Steamboat was a hot debate in our offices. We love the Western vibe and real-people/real-skiers culture. And the glades on the mountain are unrivaled. But the town is a bit low-energy compared to the competition. Then again, maybe that's a plus.

truckee
california

When we start covering lake towns, Truckee, and nearby Tahoe City, will top the list. But the dry winters have robbed this hamlet of its wintertime cachet, and we couldn't place it in the top 10 in good conscience. Fingers crossed for next season.

breckenridge
colorado

Its mountain is among the most skied in the nation. How did the town not make our top 10? This T-shirt-shop-lined burg has morphed from historic mining town to strip-mall central, causing it to fall a few historic hotels and art galleries short of authenticity.

FROM TOP: BRETT SCHRECKENGOST; KEVIN SYMS; COURTESY OF PICA'S MEXICAN TAQUERIA; COURTESY OF THE ELLICOTTVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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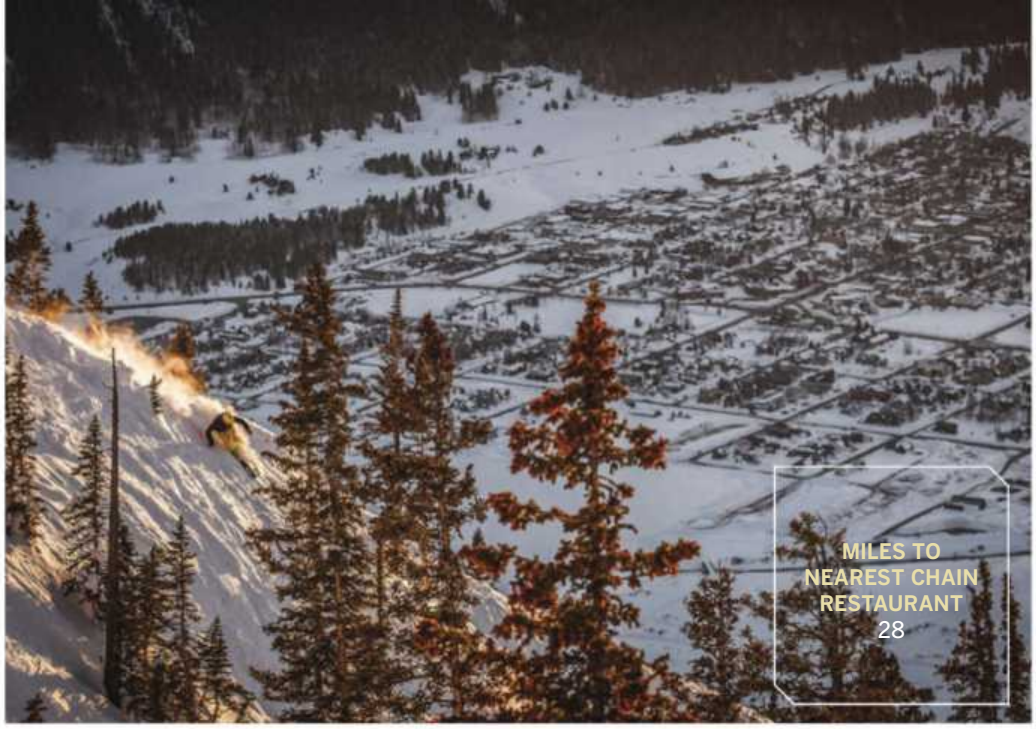
3D.RIDGE TECHNOLOGY

Several new 2015-16 models are powered by 3D.RIDGE. A raised central ridge spans the length of the ski, reducing ski weight while maintaining the perfect pressure distribution and flex. Maneuverability and edge to edge transitions are enhanced, all the while maintaining Völkl's signature stability and edge grip.

With 3D.RIDGE construction, our new WideRide XL binding system, extended Tip and Tail Rocker with camber underfoot, and UVO technology, the RTM 84 creates a completely new way to Ride the Mountain. Exhaustively engineered to create a new performance standard that you will feel on every turn.

It's that simple.

9



I was at an eighth-birthday party this spring for the son of a friend I moved to Crested Butte with 15 years ago. The kids all played soccer while the "adults" drank PBR in the shadow of Crested Butte Mountain. Rowan, the birthday boy, approached the picnic table and asked his mom, "Can I open my presents?" One of the gifts was a Magic 8 Ball, a classic toy that's been around since 1950. He unpackaged the 8 Ball with a throng of kids surrounding him. Then Rowan asked with heartfelt sincerity, "Will I be a pro skier?" He shook the ball. "Signs point to yes," the 8 Ball responded. The kids cheered.

So yeah, while most eight-year-olds are more interested in Minecraft and Legos, the youth of Crested Butte have more vertical diversions. And why not? Growing up in CB will create a certain type of grom. Quite simply, CB is an awesome place to ski. You can slide on snow at the resort, in the backcountry, on the nordic trails, and pretty much anywhere else there's snow on the ground. The resort opened up Teocalli 2 this past winter, adding 40 acres of steeps, pillows, and tunneled glades. The 30-plus-minute hike out keeps traffic down and the snow fresh. But it's not all gnar—the Gold Link, Painter Boy, and Prospect areas pair mellower terrain with some of the best views the resort has to offer.

It's true that the locals can be harsh. In a powder-day ritual that harkens back to when the North Face T-bar was a slingshot-style poma, people who biff it on the High Lift or North Face T-bars are greeted by screams of "Back of the line!" as they scuff back down the slope. It's all in good fun. But no, really, "Back of the line!"

Speaking of locals, CB is an exemplar of everything that makes a ski town rad, from locally owned restaurants and shops to coffeehouses filled with people who live for the type of adventures the town is known for. But there have been missteps. Namely, Whatever USA, when, for a few days in September 2014, Anheuser-Busch turned Crested Butte into a mythical festival town where anything goes. Some locals bristled at the corporate takeover. Others drank the free carbonated yellow water, err, Bud Light, and partied harder than the flown-in contestants.

That's what happens in places far from civilization. You have to go to extremes sometimes, and living here certainly isn't for everyone. You can tell a lot about a town by looking at the classifieds in the local paper. There are exponentially more employment ads than "For Rent" ads. Home prices are rising and VRBOs snatch up many of the housing options. The cost of living keeps climbing while wages stagnate. It's the classic mountain-town paradigm. Incredible place to live. Incredibly hard place to make a living. But if you can eke it out, an adventurous life you will have. Rowan sure will. —*Mike Horn*

{ 2015 TOP SKI TOWNS }

crested butte

colorado

population: 1,519 // median home price: $642,895 // elevation: 8,885 ft.

COURTESY OF CRESTED BUTTE TOURISM/TRENT BONA



PHOTO: BO BRIDGES

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Julia Mancuso - U.S. Ski Team
4-time Olympic Medalist
5-time FIS World Championship Medalist

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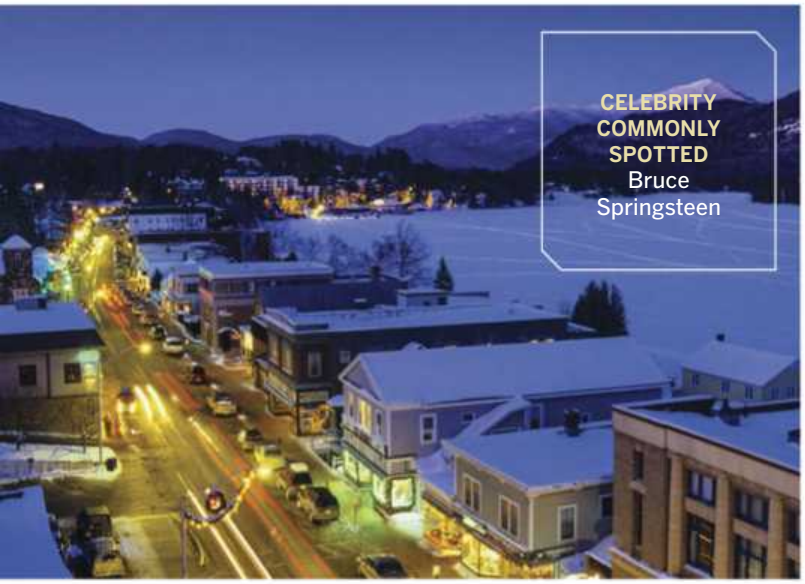
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lake placid

new york

population: 2,471 // median home price: $180,000 // elevation: 1,939 ft.



10

It's because Lake Placid is so beautiful in the summer that it's so enjoyable in the winter.

The green and leafy months are when tourists visit in their greatest numbers. And why wouldn't they? They come for the enormous and amazing Adirondack Park—for its cool temperatures, mossy forest paths, wood-smoky campsites, airy mountains, cold streams, and deep clear lakes, scores of them, rimmed with trees chirping with birdsong.

Lake Placid, an outpost of civilization amid these mountain wilds, has a long history of welcoming summer visitors, including many very wealthy ones. American aristocrats from the finest families arrived by train to take their summer in the cool Adirondack air. They brought society and culture with them. They built large (and exclusive) clubs, churches, and the famous Adirondack "great camps." There's a redbrick permanence to Lake Placid's Main Street that speaks of its long history as a thriving retreat for both the well-to-do urban rusticators and the summer masses. Massive trees shade the gracious homes and lawns of its hillside neighborhoods.

That summer tourism history gives Lake Placid a vacationland infrastructure that is outsized for the number of winter visitors. The great restaurants, fine lodges and hotels, bars, brewpubs—they're packed in July. In winter, there's still energy and bustle, but you can actually get a reservation.

The shame is that so few visitors experience Lake Placid in its wintertime beauty. On cold nights it glows with just the right incandescence, jeweled with holiday lights. Hardier people tread its sanded sidewalks, just the locals—and skiers—dressed for the cold, breathing the sharp, clean Adirondack air.

Lake Placid's famous Olympic history echoes louder when Mirror Lake is iced over and snowbanks pile high along Main Street. That's Eric Heiden's speed-skating oval in front of the high school, where he won five golds. Nearby is the Miracle on Ice arena, where, at the height of the Cold War, the Soviet Union met its match in an inspired bunch of American college kids. From just about anywhere in town, glimpsed here and there between snow-laden conifers, the view to the East is walled off by the back side of Whiteface, pinkened by afternoon light. Phil Mahre won the combined up there and took the silver in slalom. For proud winter-loving Americans, it was a good Olympics.

Whiteface, of course, has the East's greatest vert—3,430 feet. And yet it's seldom crowded. That's another thing about Lake Placid: It's a long drive from anywhere. But it's a beautiful one. And at the end of it, what might be the East's most charming and least appreciated ski town. —*J.C.*

{ STUDY + SKI }

bozeman montana
Montana State University
Combine downtown's laid-back coffeehouse culture with the lure of the surrounding outdoors—yes, skiing at Big Sky and Bridger Bowl in the winter, but endless hiking, biking, rafting, and fly-fishing in the summer—and it's hard to believe anyone gets any studying in.



boulder colorado
University of Colorado
With its healthy glow and enviable location at the foot of the Colorado Rockies, Boulder soars to the top of myriad Best Places to Live lists—for students and otherwise—pretty consistently. They're not wrong. Over a dozen ski resorts within a couple of hours, plus oodles of climbing, biking, hiking…you know the drill. And so do we. We live here.

burlington vermont
University of Vermont
This lakeside city about an hour from Stowe, Smugglers' Notch, Sugarbush, and Mad River Glen now attracts young families and hipsters—not just hippies anymore—with its charms, from the local produce at City Market to the craft breweries downtown. Swing by up-and-coming Winooski, just over the Winooski River.

FROM LEFT: NANCIE BATTAGLIA; TRAVIS ANDERSEN

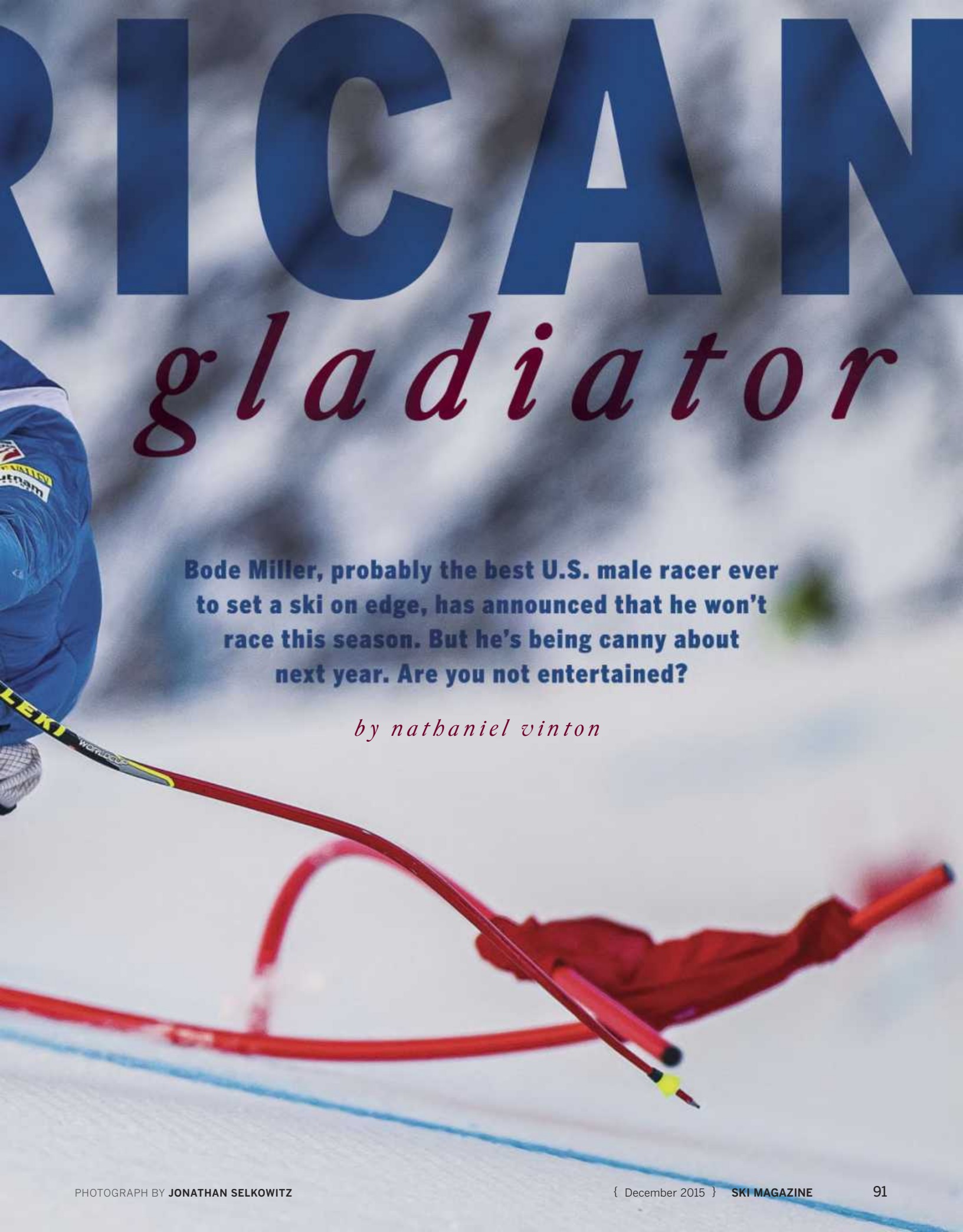

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twilight of an



Bode Miller demonstrates his sole competition mode (*Attack!*) during a downhill training session in Portillo, Chile, in 2012.



RICAN gladiator

Bode Miller, probably the best U.S. male racer ever to set a ski on edge, has announced that he won't race this season. But he's being canny about next year. Are you not entertained?

by nathaniel vinton

PHOTOGRAPH BY **JONATHAN SELKOWITZ**

Almost a minute and a half into the Birds of Prey downhill at Beaver Creek, Colo., after a section called the Abyss, racers must turn sharply left, cross a compression at about 70 miles per hour, and ski straight into a knoll that blocks their view of the next turn.

This obstacle's unofficial name is Bode's Demise, in homage to a certain American's viral-video-ready mishap there in 2003—an ugly crash where the most severe damage was the utter destruction of a fast pair of Rossignols. World Cup backroom chatter has it that a German FIS official first bestowed the moniker, and course workers have been using it ever since.

That became a backstory for what happened at that fearsome little bump on Feb. 5 last year, in the World Championship super G race, when Miller wrecked again in *exactly* the same spot. This time Miller was 37 years old, not a rubber-limbed 25-year-old, the crash was much more violent, and Miller was just 12 weeks past endoscopic back surgery.

It was Miller's first race of the season, but the gold medal was in reach (he was faster at the middle interval than Hannes Reichelt of Austria, the race's winner). As Miller approached the knoll he cut off a little too much line and caught his left arm on a blue gate. The panel yanked tight in his armpit and twisted his trunk just as he flew off the knoll in an accidental helicopter. His body rotated on two or three axes before he landed, backward, on his head and tumbled into a variety of possible mechanisms of injury.

"I still am pissed that that panel didn't come off," says Miller's longtime friend and coach, Forest Carey, eight months later. "If you watch in slow motion, it stopped him dead in his tracks. I think he might have skied out of it. It would have ruined his race, no doubt, but one of his greatest abilities is being able to recover or at least minimize the damage."

It takes a long time to slow to a stop on the ice-infused, Kevlar-like Birds of Prey downhill course. And as Miller slid toward the awestruck crowd he waved stiffly—clearly in pain. The international broadcast feed cut away to an image of his pregnant wife, Morgan, a professional volleyball player, and his two children (from previous relationships). Finally Miller stopped and slowly tried to get up. Then, with the adrenaline diminishing, he discovered that amid the cartwheeling spill the razor-sharp edge of his ski had sliced deeply into the back of his right leg, severing a tendon. As he made his way gingerly down to the finish, gory screen-grabs of the bloody gash on his calf went viral. More appropriate for a slasher film, the images showed a seemingly surgical-grade incision through his red Spyder speed suit, neatly cutting through skin and deep into muscle.

That night there was surgery, followed by a retreat to southern California—the 8,000-square-foot house Miller had purchased in a gated community between his hat-trick triumph at the 2010 Vancouver Games (bronze, silver, gold) and his sentimental bronze at Sochi in 2014. (Perhaps indicating major changes ahead in his life, his California house went on the

The greatest U.S. male racer of all time? Two overall World Cup Championships, six Olympic medals, and World Cup wins in five disciplines (he's the only racer with five or more wins in each event) say he is.



CHIP KALBACK









market for nearly $5 million as this story was going to press.) His season was over, and perhaps so was his career.

"We had 40 seconds of glory," Carey says, quoting Chris Krause, who serviced Miller's Head skis that day and was another member of the small inner circle of U.S. Ski Team personnel that Miller built around himself after disbanding his championship-winning private squad in 2009. "A lot of work and planning had gone into getting him ready for that race and everything seemed to be lining up for him to put on a big show."

Miller hasn't officially retired, and given his recent history of late starts and rehabilitative sabbaticals, fans shouldn't expect a definitive promise either way. In an Oct. 27 interview, he told me he had ruled out racing in the 2015–16 season—not retiring, but taking a year to focus on parenting his three small children and chasing several new business ventures. A longtime aficionado of horse racing, Miller has opened an ambitious new thoroughbred training stable in Maryland,

Clockwise from top left: Miller's gnarly crash in the super G at the 2015 World Championships in Beaver Creek; the result, a deep gash in his right leg; Miller, his wife, Morgan, and his older son from a previously relationship (now age two), shown here in 2013, and again after a training run at the 2015 Worlds.

called Double Black Diamond Racing. Nine years after NBC Sports sage Bob Costas predicted that Miller was destined to be "forgotten," the network has signed Miller up as an on-air analyst at the Birds of Prey races, Dec. 4 through 6. "I thought I'd give it a try, see how it feels," Miller says. "If I have fun with it, maybe I'll do more."

Might he return to the slopes? All Miller will say is that it's "really unlikely" he will race all the way to the Winter Games in South Korea in 2018, when he'll be 40. Those close to him say he intends to return to the World Cup circuit at some point; a logical target in 2017 is Kitzbühel, the famed Austrian race where Miller has never quite won the downhill.

If he does return, perhaps he will be on equipment from Bomber Ski, a new company led by New York real estate investor Robert Siegel. After wiggling out of his contract with Head, Miller signed with Bomber this summer and has taken an equity interest in the company. He says the company has the potential to develop a World Cup giant-slalom ski. "He's going to be involved in every aspect of the company, from the business plan to the designs of the skis," says Siegel.

Those wishing for an affirmative sign of Miller's eventual return to snow can turn to Miller's wife's Instagram feed. Soon after giving birth to Miller's third child, Nash Skan Miller, on May 18, Morgan Miller posted a photo of her placenta, dried and pulverized and placed in capsules. In the caption, she noted that her husband had already popped a few of the capsules, which are said to aid in recovery.

Prodigy. Pioneer. Rebel. Survivor.

Bode Miller has earned each of these titles in his 20 years at the top of alpine ski racing. A fouler set of labels stuck to him after the gloomy winter of 2005–06, when Miller notoriously went zero for 5

CLOCKWISE FROMTOP LEFT: JONATHAN SELKOWITZ; AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES; CHIP KALBACK; EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES

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in the medals at the Torino Olympics and committed reputational arson with a few disastrous comments and some unflattering nightclub photos.

"I got to party and socialize at an Olympic level," Miller said from Italy. This little quote, along with a wayward remark on *60 Minutes* about skiing while drunk the year before, contributed to Miller's falling out with U.S. Team administrators in 2007. These comments torched Miller's public profile too, casting him, unfairly, as America's version of the entitled modern athlete. But rising from the ashes of all those burned bridges was the skier who would become a sort of elder statesman of the circuit and help modernize the whole U.S. program.

It's even tempting now to say that today's polished crop of champions—Lindsey Vonn, Mikaela Shiffrin, and Ted Ligety—benefited from Miller's 2006 trip to rock bottom, after which team administrators and coaches learned to adapt the program to better accommodate its biggest stars and the unique pressure they face as celebrities in this age of social media, self-branding, and, in Vonn's case, paparazzi, red carpets, and private jets.

For Miller, all missteps were eclipsed in 2010, when he returned from a two-and-a-half-year exile from the U.S. Ski Team and won bronze, silver, and gold on the rugged Olympic slope at Whistler Blackcomb. He had snuck into those Games, having flirted with retirement and started the season late, injured, and without equipment. With Vonn carrying the burden of American expectations, Miller had the chance to play the underdog role that has always suited him best.

"You could see it at the start gate—every one of us was like, 'That dude is going to be in a coma.'"

In the five years since, informed fans have accepted the idea of Miller, once the sport's enfant terrible, as its veteran ambassador. Miller mostly avoids the media spotlight, choosing carefully when to speak out on safety issues or to help the national team's parent organization, USSA, raise funds from corporate sponsors and private donors. He speaks as someone who has started 795 FIS races since 1994, forged deep relationships with five European ski factories, run his own World Cup team, and seen peers endure catastrophic crashes resulting in broken necks, permanent brain damage, and, in one case, a lower-leg amputation.

Miller vividly recalls the career-ending head injury Austrian downhiller Hans Grugger suffered at Kitzbühel in 2011, when Grugger crashed off the fearsome





Above: How do you like them apples at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics? Miller sports a full flush of medals: bronze (downhill), silver (super G), and gold (super combined). Right: Racing at the 2006 Torino Games, which didn't work out for Miller—on course or off.

FROM LEFT: DOUG PENSINGER/CAA/GETTY IMAGES; JONATHAN SELKOWITZ

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Mausfalle jump near the top of the terrifying Streif course.

"You could see it at the start gate—every one of us was like, 'That dude is going to be in a coma,'" Miller says. "Unless you've faced that and had to go out of the start gate after that, you can't imagine what it takes. If you're not throwing your body forward with the full intention of going fast, you're going to get injured."

Miller had plenty of injuries, but nothing life-altering. Surviving, he says, was largely about luck, but also about the recovery instincts he honed as a youngster.

"I couldn't rely on talent, so I had to take so much more risk and had to do so many extreme things," says Miller. "I was only able to reach a certain level on my skill. I had to take crazy risks after that…I saw my friend run into a beech tree and split his head open when I was eight years old skiing at Cannon, so I knew about the bad side of the sport from a very young age."

The wisdom and racing know-how Miller has collected over his career are unlike anything that was available to him in 1996, when he qualified for the U.S. Team with a surprise third-place finish at the national championships at Sugarloaf. (He was a senior at nearby Carrabassett Valley Academy and hardly the school's brightest prospect.) Back then the U.S. Team was struggling through CEO turnover and budget mismanagement. The same week Miller made the team, some top coaches quit and others convened an emergency summit meeting to discuss a perceived crisis in the development of young talent.

Now we have Vonn, Shiffrin, Julia Mancuso, and Miller's protégé, Ted Ligety. The team's renaissance, led by Miller, has inverted the whole coach-racer relationship; new members of the team's coaching staff have vastly more to learn from Miller and his teammates than the other way around. After stints on the World Cup, U.S. Ski Team coaches now take positions in some of the USSA's more than 300 youth clubs, helping the strategies and mindset of championship skiing migrate to the next generation.

Miller is also hoping to take a more formal role in educating young skiers on the team. For a supremely gifted athlete, but one with an iconoclastic view of the world, it's not surprising that Miller's greatest effect on American ski racing might be structural changes in how the ski team deals with its young charges. Essentially: Less whip, more sugar cubes. And much more latitude in career self-determination by all athletes, especially the rock stars.

"For being the world-class athlete that he is, he cares a lot about his teammates," says U.S. Ski and Snowbird Association CEO and president Tiger Shaw. "The coaches see it and comment on it a lot. He's trying to help the young up-and-comers.



Night at the museum: Miller works the publicity circuit in 2013 at the New York Gold Medal Gala at the American Museum of Natural History.

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He's so concerned about the knowledge transfer. He doesn't want it lost. He wants success to breed success."

It's impossible to pinpoint a date when Miller slipped into the seasoned-veteran role, but the process was certainly complete by Nov. 29, 2011, the day he led a protest by World Cup downhillers over what they saw as unsafe terrain on the Birds of Prey course.

Miller's protest—he stood on a knoll during the course-inspection period and consulted with each of the top 30 skiers in the event—resulted in the cancellation of the day's training run while terrain adjustments were made. That evening, the top FIS official on site publicly commended Miller's professionalism. This happened in the aftermath of a hideous spate of major injuries on some of the world's classic downhill venues. There sometimes seemed to be a cold war between the racers and the FIS, but here was a temporary thaw.

"For a long time, even the guys on my own team wouldn't call me a spokesman for them," Miller says. "In that case it just so happened that all of our opinions fell on the same side. But I do think I've proven that I look out for my teammates, and I do look out for the general populace."

So if it's really over for Miller, let's pause to see what the record books will have to say about this New Hampshire icon, who started skiing on the trails behind the Tamarack Tennis Camp in Franconia before spending truant days devising his own technique at Cannon Mountain.

First there are 33 World Cup wins between 2001 and 2011, including the famous downhills at Wengen and Bormio, the night slalom at Schladming, and the historic combined at Kitzbühel. It's unlikely that anyone will ever match Miller's winning streak of December 2004, when he collected victories in all four of the sport's disciplines in the span of just 16 days. That, rightly, is the DNA of legitimate ski-racing legend.

There is another record-setting streak running through the 438 World Cup races Miller started since his first in 1997, and it earns him the participation award. Between 2002 and 2006, Miller started in 136 consecutive races, finally skipping a race so he could take a pre-Olympic golf vacation with his brother Chelone. He is, quite simply, the Cal Ripken of ski racing.

Add to those World Cup wins Miller's six Olympic medals, four World Championship golds, and six World Cup discipline titles. As for the trophy that means the most to ski racers—the overall World Cup season title—Miller has two of them: one from 2005 that snapped a 22-year dry spell for the United States, and another that he won in 2008, after splitting from the team and forming his own program, Team America.

What no trophy case can reflect is the unconventional racing style that got Miller to the top—a way of carving that turned the pieties of technique and tactics upside





Left: Podium finish (second place) in the GS at the 2013 Birds of Prey, Beaver Creek, Colo.; Miller (gold) and U.S. teammate Daron Rahlves (silver) are the first Americans (male or female) to finish 1-2 in any event at the Alpine World Championships.

JONATHAN SELKOWITZ (2)

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down, making virtues out of what many coaches would have previously called bad habits. Leaning his hips back, he put bend in the tails of his skis; holding his arms out to his sides (rather than driving them forward) enhanced his balance, though all the windmilling gave him an appearance of recklessness.

Tommy Moe, the 1994 Olympic downhill champion, vividly recalls the first time he saw the unorthodox approach, made possible in part by Miller's willingness to try what was then considered to be the ridiculously sidecut K2 Four at the 1996 U.S. Championships. In a 2011 interview, Moe described the day in April of 1996

"I was just like, 'Oh my God,'" Tommy Moe recalled. "He was just ripping. Best skier I'd ever seen."

"The thing that good coaches could see was that his ankles were always flexed, even when his arms were swinging all over the place or his hips were back," says Thomas Erhard, one of Miller's early coaches on the national team. "That's a crucial point that the ski team is focusing a lot on now. There's something in his anatomy, his strength, and mainly his understanding of making skis go that allows him to keep those ankles flexed and the skis pressured."

when he looked down from a Mt. Bachelor chairlift and saw Miller. It was a NorAm GS, late in the start order, and Miller came down with a beat-up old race suit and a radically direct line. "I was just like, 'Oh my God,'" Moe recalled in a 2011 interview. "He was just ripping. Best skier I'd ever seen."

Miller matched that technique with a rare mental toughness that allowed him to continue his kamikaze approach despite all the crashing and discomfort it caused. Go online and you'll find video clips in which Miller skis up on the fencing at Kitzbühel's infamous Steilhang exit, or completes most of the Bormio downhill on one ski. You'll also find disasters like the most recent one at Beaver Creek—crashes where Miller breaks his ankle, blows out his knee, and bloodies his mouth with gates to the face. It's driven his coaches to fits, but when Miller says that winning isn't his primary drive when competing—it's giving it his all on the course—it's not a crafted sound bite for kids to digest. It's the truth.

"He's had plenty of injuries, and the fact that he's kept going speaks to his perseverance and his skill, to be able to navigate all that," says Shaw, who replaced Bill Marolt at the helm of the team in March 2014. "He's not a spring chicken anymore, but Bode figures out how to get to where he wants to go."

Today the most interesting question isn't how much longer Miller will continue to race but what he'll do after he's done.

FROM LEFT: NATHAN BILOW; JONATHAN SELKOWITZ





Left: Miller takes flight into the future at the 2014 Sochi Winter Games, more likely than not his final Olympics; podium strut after the GS competition at the 2013 Birds of Prey.






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He has invested heavily in thoroughbred horses with an eye toward the Triple Crown racing scene. The folks at NBC, who have extended their Olympic broadcast rights through 2032, would be happy to have Miller's commentary beyond this season's gig at the Birds of Prey World Cup races.

But the most meaningful work ahead in Miller's eyes might be his Turtle Ridge Foundation, the nonprofit he set up in 2005 to support adaptive skiing and youth-sports organizations. Among the grateful recipients of TRF funding is Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports, which got a $100,000 donation toward its new facility at Pico Mountain.

I recently wrote a book about ski racing, which included unauthorized biographies of Miller and Vonn. Miller was the more open of the two, and toward the end of my writing project I went to his family's Tamarack Tennis Club, which was hosting the Bode Bash, an annual golf and tennis tournament that brings in hundreds of supporters. (Bode, a passionate and skilled tennis player growing up, was a high school champion and a few years back competed in a U.S. Open qualifying tournament.)

There I met volunteers and officers from a network of supporters of disabled skiing. They showed me the advanced shock-absorption technology in a new generation of sit-skis. I was reminded of an interview Miller gave to Scottish journalist Neil McQuoid and me in 2004, in Flachau, Austria. Miller had talked about the potential of shock-absorbing ski-boot setups and theorized that a "gentlemen's agreement" among the manufacturers kept them from realizing the potential. Miller drank an entire two-liter bottle of orange Fanta in the course of the interview.

At the Bode Bash, fans can mix it up with the legendary skier on Tamarack tennis courts on Saturday, or on the golf course the next day. In the spring there is the Bode Fest, a youth ski race at Bretton Woods in either March or April, depending in part on whether Bode is at World Cup Finals.

One of the foundation's board members is Miller's childhood friend Cameron Shaw-Doran, who was paralyzed in a car accident and later took up sit-skiing, or what the TRF calls monoskiing. Frustrated by the high cost and poor design of the monoskis he used, Shaw-Doran began collaborating with some MIT-affiliated engineers to develop a better model that could be produced for less than a third of the price of what was on the market.

Kyla Clark, the Turtle Ridge Foundation president (and Miller's sister) says TRF gives the monoskis away because "we don't want people to have to have a financial reason why they can't do it." Instead, TRF asks donors to pledge money for monoskis that cost $2,000 to $2,500 apiece. To see the wealthy benefactors line up behind the project is to be reminded of how Bode Miller got to the top of skiing through acts of charity—scholarships, the patience of coaches, and ski-team donations.

Surveying everything that has come since, Miller says he has few regrets. He made some sacrifices, he says, but not as many as some others.

"It's one of the reasons I was so criticized, is what I didn't sacrifice. I was better at balancing what sacrifices I was willing to make," Miller says. "That's one of the really challenging things about ski racing. You can get all these trophies and accolades and have no life. I put enough into it but didn't give up the rest of my life, so I'm not one of these athletes who gets to the end and says, 'Where did my childhood go?' Or 'Where did my twenties go?'" ●

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF GREG KEELER/CANNON MOUNTAIN; JONATHAN SELKOWITZ



Top: Bode Fest at Cannon Mountain, N.H. Right: Determined to finish after crashing at the 2005 World Championships, Miller descends most of the course on one ski.


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2016 GEAR of the YEAR

Nearly 100 testers offered their input in this year's ski and boot tests. They didn't always agree, but sometimes they did—emphatically. Here are their clear favorites, along with some innovative bindings and a few of the editors' favorite apparel items. Winter is here. Are you equipped for it?

By Joe Cutts, Greg Ditrinco, and Samantha Berman
Photographs by Keri Bascetta



LANGE XT 2.0

All-Mountain Adventure
Fit: Narrow (LV) or Medium
Flex: 80–130
Hike mode: Yes
MSRP: $550–$850

Lange is still the most decorated brand in the test, blending ever-improving comfort with the performance testers expect of it. The latest revisions to the hike-ready XT line only add to the legend. The cuff-release mechanism is stronger, the liner is lighter, and the reshaped lower shell offers better fit and hike-mode range of motion. **Shown: XT 2.0 130, $850**

ROSSIGNOL Allspeed/Pure

All-Mountain Traditional
Fit: Narrow, Medium, or Wide
Flex: 70–130
Hike mode: No
MSRP: $400–$850

Rossi brilliantly simplifies its frontside boot offering: the new Allspeed for men, Pure for women, in three widths for each. All the usual stiffness options are available, so the lines range from snug and precise to soft and cruisey. Testers of all different sizes and shapes had the same high opinion of them. And the new moldable heel pocket (on top-end models) works great. **Shown: Allspeed Elite 130, $850**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **KERI BASCETTA**



SKI MAGAZINE GEAR OF THE YEAR 2016

VÖLKL 100Eight

Men's Mixed Snow West
Dimensions: 141-108-124
MSRP: $825

Völkl's new Eight-series skis are visibly innovative—thick down the middle, slim at the edges. They look cool, and they're noticeably lightweight. But do they perform? "An instant Völkl classic," one tester said of the 100Eight. "Incredibly nimble for its girth," said another. Only two other skis scored higher for Overall Impression.

NORDICA Enforcer

Men's Mixed Snow West
Dimensions: 133-100-121
MSRP: $799

Nordica, the boot brand, still struggles for recognition—and market share—as a ski brand. Maybe putting up the top score of any ski in the test will broaden its appeal beyond gear cognoscenti. Testers universally adored the new Enforcer. Because it made them ski like studs. "Plenty of power and precision, but playful too." "The new benchmark."

BLIZZARD Brahma

Men's Mixed Snow East
Dimensions: 125-88-110
MSRP: $780

Usually the 98-mm Bonafide gets all the attention. This year the narrower Brahma was the Blizzard testers really fell for. Similar power, balance, and versatility, with enhanced quickness that a 50-day Eastern skier will love. It arcs, smears, slithers through bumps, and darts though trees. "Strong but never scary." "Simply an awesome ski."

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MARKER Kingpin 13
Tech-Style Alpine Touring
DIN: 6–13
MSRP: $649

For tourability, the tech-style toe can't be beat. For skiability, you want the secure feel of a step-in heel. The Kingpin, which debuted in-season last year, gives you both. Marker had issues with toe durability early on but took care of that quickly. So no more pussyfooting: Earn your turns and hammer them too. There's a 10-DIN version as well ($599).

LOOK Pivot 14 Dual
WTR-Compatible Alpine
DIN: 5–14
MSRP: $425

SALOMON Warden MNC 13
WTR- and AT-Compatible Alpine
DIN: 4–13
MSRP: $325

Look (like sister brand Rossi) advances the Walk to Ride concept with bindings that accept both normal alpine-style and the new rockered WTR-style boot soles (in a clever way that doesn't compromise ramp angle). Salomon got the WTR thing going, and its MNC bindings accept all three norms: alpine, WTR, and AT. Atomic and Scott are also in the WTR game, for a total of five WTR brands, representing a large share of the market. The goal: a hybrid boot-binding interface, offering alpine-boot skiability and AT-boot walkability. Retailers seem slow to warm to WTR. And so far it's mostly offered on high-end bindings. But as prices come down, acceptance will grow. Watch for at least one other major binding brand to join the WTR fray soon.



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DYNASTAR Elite 11

Women's Groomed Snow
Dimensions: 121-72-105
MSRP: $800 with binding

Is it wrong that testers get such a kick out of skiing the narrow, knifey hard-snow specialists? Hell, no. Resurgent Dynastar had a strong test, and the Elite 11 reminds you how much fun a groomer day can be, egging you on to ever higher speeds. "Fast, clean arcs. Lots of energy. Had me giggling like a schoolgirl."

VÖLKL Kenja

Women's Mixed Snow East
Dimensions: 127-90-110
MSRP: $825

Very often Gear of the Year honors go to innovative new models on the market. But sometimes a returning favorite won't be ignored. The plucky, do-everything Kenja put up the highest score of any women's ski in the test. "High fun factor. Energetic, dynamic personality. Solid, flowy, super-fun confidence builder."

K2 iKonic 85 Ti

Men's Groomed Snow
Dimensions: 126-85-114
MSRP: $1,100 with binding

The stakes are high when a market-leading brand blows up its core line. No sweat, though—K2 makes it look fun. The spiel: a new construction that's dense over the edges, light down the middle. For serious arcs, the metal-reinforced 85 Ti held its own against the pseudo-racers of the Groomed Snow category. For lively quickness, nothing could touch it. "Makes skiing effortless."

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2016



TECNICA Mach1

All-Mountain Traditional
Fit: Narrow (LV) or Medium (MV)
Flex: 75–130
Hike mode: No
MSRP: $360–$840

The Mach1 killed it in last year's test, and the line returns, skiing as strong as ever, with a new low-volume option for those who like it (or need it) tight. Crack bootfitters were consulted to make sure it fits well initially and then is easy to tweak. The men slightly preferred the snugger LV over the MV model; female testers preferred their roomier MV. **Shown: Mach1 130 LV, $840**

NORDICA GPX

Men's All-Mountain Traditional
Fit: Narrow
Flex: 85-130
Hike mode: No
MSRP: $499–$799

Male testers concurred that the new GPX line represents the continuing return to greatness for Nordica. The brand gets back to basics with this no-BS performer: great fit, sensible stance angles, quick power to edge. Race-boot performance meets PrimaLoft-insulated comfort. **Shown: GPX 130, $799**



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Ridgeline Hybrid Down Insulator
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6. DAKINE
Women's Heli Pro 11 20L
MSRP: $90
Dakine's signature Heli Pack has been updated this season with a women-specific model. Changes include a narrower shoulder width and a higher sternum strap to improve load distribution and reduce pressure points, as well as a downsized lumbar belt suited for narrower waists and wider hips. The slim 20L model also boasts gender-neutral goodies such a ski-carrying system, helmet tote, fleece-lined eyewear stash, laptop sleeve, and enough cargo pockets and tool compartments

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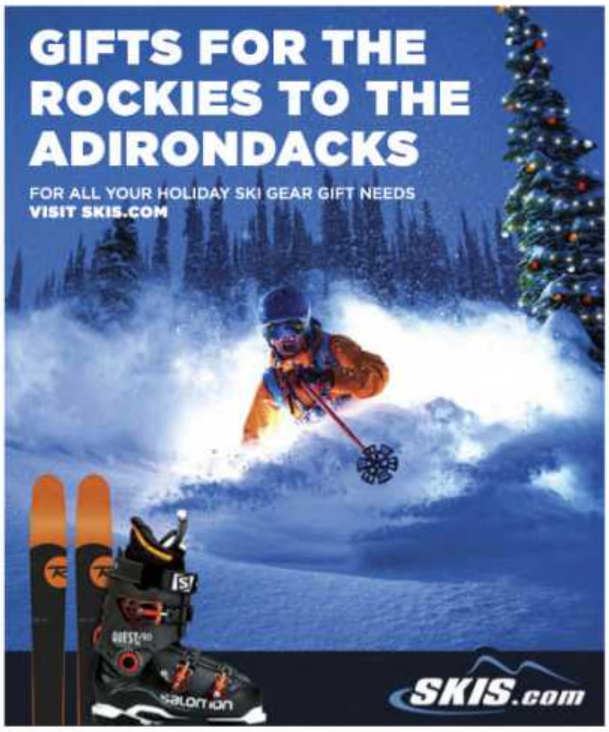
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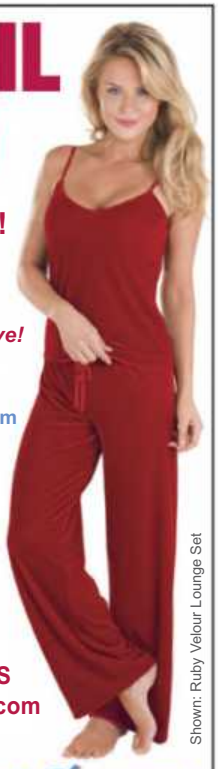


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on skiing

Road Trip

BY DEVON O'NEIL

THE LAST THING YOU WANT TO hear while traveling at 80 mph on a barren interstate in rural Montana is an expletive indicating a loss of control. Yet that's what my twin brother, Sean, gasped as we began to fishtail around a shaded, icy curve.

"Shit."

It was last January, and we were on our way to the steeps of Bridger Bowl. The trip had taken months of coordination due to circumstances that also served as its inspiration: Sean has two children under six, and my wife was expecting our first in April. We aimed to steal one last adventure together before time got even tighter.

I left my home in Breckenridge at 6:30 a.m. and met Sean in Denver. I drove the first eight hours. We traded places in Sheridan. Precisely 54 miles later, at 3:40 p.m., Sean felt the tires slide on I-90. I was looking down at a CD. I realized we were in trouble when I looked up and saw us skimming across the road to the right. People say it happens fast, and it does.

We spun a quarter-rotation clockwise before the front left wheel caught some snow on the shoulder. My truck, a 2008 Nissan, flipped two and a half times and landed upside down in a ditch. The roof collapsed eight inches. All the windows blew out. The side airbags deployed but were punctured by flying glass. I recall the airbag next to my head inflating and then popping, and thinking that wasn't a good development.

We rolled in 20 inches of snow, which cushioned the impact and probably saved our lives. It also left the cab half-full of what felt like avalanche debris when we stopped, suspended upside down by our seatbelts.

The scariest thought of my life ensued from there. For an instant, I wondered whether Sean was alive.



"Are you OK?" I asked. My voice was quivering.

"Yeah," he replied, obviously still taking stock of what happened. "Are you?"

Shards of glass had shredded my head and arms. Soon my white shirt would be soaked in blood, an ominous image for the motorist across the highway to see when he stopped a minute after the crash and called 911. Next came a Bureau of Indian Affairs officer (we crashed on the Crow Reservation), then a state patrolman, then the paramedics a few minutes later. I remember wondering why no one used any sirens. Staring at my totaled truck, I felt like we'd won the lottery.

The crash left a debris field 70 yards long, including the roof rack and three pairs of skis. We never found Sean's poles.

"Ski trip: over," Sean said.

Our paramedics were a pair of middle-age women who worked Tuesdays and Thursdays and reminded me of the movie *Fargo*. "The Flat Corner got ya," Patty said once she knew we were OK. "There's no bank. It just turns."

Sean went to talk to the state trooper, which left me filling in the gals. "Skiers, eh?" Patty said, raising her eyebrows. When she finished her evaluation of my cuts, she looked at Karen. "Maybe some glue for the head wound and a stitch or two on the arm, but I think he's all right." She turned toward me. "You could probably even still go skiing."

We caught a ride with Travis, the driver of the tow truck, back to Sheridan and unloaded the truck at his junkyard. Then Travis dropped us off at the Best Western. Sean and I called our wives. I think all four of us felt a tug to reunite in our homes, but by then Sean and I were intent on continuing. It felt like we had an obligation.

It was nine below when we picked up a rented Chevy Impala at the Sheridan airport the next morning and once more set out toward Bozeman. I drove cautiously past the crash site, marveling at our good fortune and feeling some weird cosmic connection to this poorly engineered curve. We boarded our first lift at Bridger at one o'clock—just four hours later than we originally planned.

This is not a story about skiing the best powder of your life after totaling your truck. We spent our weekend punching through a quarter-inch rain crust.

Sunday morning, a friend gave us a ride to the airport. A storm was moving in as we took off, and we watched the fat flakes fall outside the window, down one vehicle but up in perspective.

The trip had been a bust in so many ways. But it also reminded each of us, lest we forget, what matters in our lives. It damn sure isn't a pickup truck or powder snow. I leaned back in my seat and fell asleep, full of life and gratitude. ●

Devon O'Neil is a writer based in Breckenridge. His son, Lachlan, was born in April.

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